Finding Harry

«--Prologue--»

Potters Die in Attack on Home

1 November, 1981

Godric's Hollow. James and Lily Potter, well-known fighters against He-who-must-not-be-named, were found dead in their ruined home late last night by Aurors who had been sent to check on reports of a blast in that area. It is believed that the Dark Lord came to kill them and their one-year-old son, Harry. Unfortunately, the boy was missing when the Aurors arrived, leading to speculation on where the child could be. Some believe that the Dark Lord has taken the child to raise as his own, and others think that when he tried to kill the child, both of them were completely destroyed.

Albus Dumbledore, a good friend of the Potters and headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, has offered a reward leading to any information about the whereabouts of young Harry Potter. He stated that he did not believe that the Dark Lord was gone, but that his attack on the Potters has severely weakened him, and that he cannot currently threaten the wizarding world. He says that he also believes that the Potter boy is still alive somewhere. He is, however, quite concerned about the boy's disappearance. He stated that the Ministry of Magic should work hard to find the child and ensure his safety, as he is now entirely without family in the magical community.

This reporter hopes the headmaster of Hogwarts is correct about the Dark Lord's disappearance, and that young Harry Potter is safe, wherever he is.

Rita Skeeter, reporting for the Daily Prophet.

Sirius Black Arrested for Mass Murder

2 November, 1981

London. Sirius Black, friend of the recently murdered Potters, was captured today, shortly after a horrific attack in a Muggle street. Before the Muggle witnesses were memory charmed by attending Aurors, several of them said that Black had been accosted by another friend of the Potters, one Peter Pettigrew, who accused Black of betraying the Potters to He-who-must-not-be-named. Upon being confronted, Black destroyed not only Pettigrew, but several Muggles in the vicinity. It is speculated that Black may have betrayed his friends to the Dark Lord to gain a high position in his inner circle.

Peter Pettigrew is being hailed as a hero, and has been posthumously awarded the Order of Merlin, second class for his brave confrontation of the murderer, Black. His service will take place next Saturday at noon on his mother's estate near Cambridge.

Black is being charged with fourteen counts of murder, not to mention several violations of Muggle secrecy codes. Minister Crouch has denied him even a trial. "Everyone knows that the blackguard is guilty," the Minister has said. "Why waste time and galleons on a trial that will only prove what we all know? It is better to simply have him off the streets. Muggles and Magical people alike will sleep much safer tonight because of it." This reporter agrees with the minister, and hopes that Black is truly the strongest of the Dark Lord's followers, as that would mean that the Death Eaters' reign of terror is nearly at an end.

Rita Skeeter, reporting for the Daily Prophet.

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6 November, 1981

Dumbledore folded up the latest copy of the Daily Prophet and placed it on his desk. It had been a week, now, and Harry was still missing. He refused to believe the boy was gone. Surely there would have been a body if Riddle had managed to kill the boy. And yet, when Hagrid had arrived there, the only living person there had been Sirius.

Dumbledore took off his spectacles and rubbed at his eyes. Sirius…he simply couldn't believe it. Yes, Dumbledore had asked the Potters to let him be their secret-keeper, but he'd never really believed that if Sirius was their secret-keeper that he would betray

them. It was beyond anything he could possibly have ever believed. Sirius and James had been like brothers ever since they had attended Hogwarts together. And Sirius had left his family rather than join them in their Muggle-bashing ways. How could Sirius go from James and Lily's closest friend to being their betrayer?

But Riddle was crafty. He always seemed to know just what people needed to draw them to his side. Promises, trickery, even the Imperious Curse had been used. He didn't envy Crouch his job of sorting through all the Death Eaters that had been captured so far. Dumbledore just hoped that the entire thing wouldn't turn into a witch hunt. It was good that they had already caught so many Death Eaters. Too bad Lucius Malfoy, always a slippery devil, would be able to wiggle out of things as usual.

Dumbledore's thoughts turned back to Sirius. Perhaps he had taken Harry and hidden him away. He did seem to genuinely care for the boy. But if Sirius had been with Riddle, perhaps that had all just been an act? And what if he'd taken Harry and…no, he just couldn't believe anyone would do that to a defenseless child. And Dumbledore would certainly have felt it if Riddle's spell had had its intended effect. The boy just had to be alive somewhere.

And Dumbledore would not rest until he found him.

«--1--»

Orion

If you asked Orion if he was happy with his life, it would give him pause for thought. He had a beautiful mother, a handsome and strong father, a twin brother with whom he shared almost everything, and above all, he lived in one of the most important historical magical manors-Malfoy Manor. But despite this, Orion knew that there was something that was missing. It wasn't something easily quantifiable, either. It had simply always been missing, so it seemed impossible to figure out exactly what it could be.

He and his twin brother, Draco, had good days and bad, just like other siblings. The best days were those the two of them spent entirely alone together. They often did not even need to speak to know what the other was thinking. The house-elves would often find them tucked away in some remote corner of the estate, their two blonde heads close together, the only noise coming from them soft giggling.

Though Orion adored his father, he had to admit that most of the worst days revolved around the times he and Draco spent under their father's instruction. Though Draco was the older of the two boys-by almost an hour, something that showed in the fact that he was also a few inches taller than Orion, and always seemed to hit the milestones of childhood, sometimes months ahead of Orion—it was Orion who was the stronger, magically. And their father delighted in pointing this out. After each exercise, he would invariably shower praise upon Orion, then turn and berate Draco for failing to live up to his brother's example. Often, after these lessons, Draco would go days without speaking to Orion. When this happened, Orion was almost able to blame it on their father. But he simply couldn't. He admired him too much.

Time spent with their "friends" wasn't much better. The boys they were allowed to play with were all children of their father's friends. Unfortunately, this was such a limited selection that it also meant that none of them were much fun to hang out with. Vince Crabbe and Greg Goyle were okay, but they were so mentally slow that choice of

entertainment was either eating or bullying smaller children, pastimes neither Orion nor Draco found engaging. The other two boys, Theodore Nott and Blaise Zabini, usually challenged anything either of them said, often until they ended up having to duel them to shut them up. The Malfoy boys always won, of course, but it only served to make the other boys that much more surly.

So, between lessons with their father, and "playtime" with their "friends," Orion and Draco much preferred their alone time. Alone, they could forget about having to be perfect little Malfoys. They could forget that they were expected to attend Durmstrang instead of going to Hogwarts like everyone else they knew. They could just be little boys. They were best friends and brothers, all in one neat package. After all, doesn't everyone want a best friend who understands everything?

But Orion was soon to discover that nothing was what it appeared. Though he loved his family, there were secrets he didn't know. Secrets that only his father could fully explain. Secrets that would not be revealed until the day he got his letter for Hogwarts. Or, as it turned out, letters.

Draco and Orion had been looking forward to receiving their letters to Hogwarts ever since they first learned of the school's existence. They knew that their father planned to send them to Durmstrang, but they had spent many hours together planning just how to get him to send them to Hogwarts. And they knew that the weak link in his chain was their mother.

Narcissa Malfoy was a very strong woman. She had not married out of love, but she had made sure to marry the *right* man. A man who could provide for her in the way she had become accustomed as a girl. Only the best for Narcissa Black. She had also gone so far as to extend this to her sons. She was not an overly doting mother, but she made sure that they always had the best of everything. And since Hogwarts was the best magical school around, why shouldn't her sons attend it?

It had ultimately been Draco's idea to take their letters to Narcissa the moment they got them. That way, their parents would battle it out,

and both boys knew that eventually, it would be their mother who would win. So, when three owls arrived one morning, one with a letter for Draco, one with a letter for Orion, and the third dropping its letter in Orion's lap, the boys were all set to run to their mother. But the third letter distracted them.

Draco's letter was addressed to *Draco Thomas Malfoy*. Orion's was addressed to *Orion Salazar Malfoy*. But the third letter was addressed, to their utter confusion, to *Harry James Potter*. Both of them had heard of the Boy Who Had Disappeared. Their father talked about him frequently, laughing about it almost as though it were a joke. But why on earth would Orion receive a letter addressed to him? They discussed the letters for several minutes before Draco finally dared his brother to open the envelope.

"But Drake, it's not addressed to me!"

Draco spread his comfortingly familiar sneer across his face. "Maybe it is, Ori, maybe *you're* the Boy Who Disappeared!"

"Bugger that, Drake. We're twins. I can't be. 'Sides, I look nothing like the pictures we've seen of the Potters. Didn't Harry Potter have black hair?"

Draco sniggered. "Maybe father dyes your hair while you're asleep."

Orion pushed at his brother, and Draco pushed back. "G'won, Ori. You know you want to."

Orion stuck out his tongue at his brother. "So what if I do? I'm not Harry Potter, so I can't."

"If you don't, I will…" Draco snatched at the letter, but Orion pulled it away so that Draco couldn't reach it.

"No you won't, Drake. It came to me, and if anyone's opening it, I am."

"So open it already, *Harry*," Draco jeered at him.

Orion glared at his brother, his pale blue-green eyes narrowing. "Fine, I will." He slipped his finger underneath the flap of the envelope, and felt more than saw *something* fly out of it when he broke the seal. He glanced at his brother, who was still completely preoccupied with the envelope Orion was opening, so maybe he'd just been imagining things? Orion took a deep breath and pulled the parchment inside out of the envelope. There were the usual letters he knew that he would find in his own letter, accepting Harry Potter to Hogwarts, and the equipment list, but there was also a third letter.

Dear Mr. Potter,

This letter was spelled so that it could only be opened by you, and if my owl has done a proper job, then it has found you as it was supposed to. It may come as a bit of a surprise, but I have been looking for you for ten years. I was close to your Parents, and promised myself that I would keep you all safe, but I failed. Ten years ago, on Halloween night, a wizard known as Voldemort came and killed your parents. He would have killed you, too, but something stopped him. Unfortunately, before the person I sent to get you arrived, you disappeared.

All I can hope is that you have had a good life. I also hope that you know about the Wizarding world, and also your own legend, as it is important that you know what you will face when you come here to Hogwarts. For that is what I intend, Harry. For you to come to Hogwarts. To ensure this, I have spelled the seal on this envelope to alert me of your location once you open it. I will be there as soon as I can, Harry. Do not worry about what is to come. I will not let anyone hurt you.

Albus Dumbledore

Orion swallowed. Draco whistled once he had finished the letter. He looked wide-eyed at his brother. "I didn't mean it, Ori. You're my brother. Father won't let anyone take you away from us." He grabbed his brother, and hugged him roughly to him. "I don't care who you really are. You'll always be my brother."

Orion's entire body began to shake. It couldn't be. Father wouldn't do that. He just wouldn't. Besides, father loved him. Would he truly love

the boy who had destroyed the Dark Lord? "Ori?" Draco whispered. Orion just shook harder. "Ori, look at me." Orion couldn't move. He was numb. "Ori, everything will be all right. It's probably a mix-up. Come on, we need to tell mum about our letters, remember?"

Orion closed his eyes, and when they opened, for a second Draco thought his eyes had gone just a bit greener, but then the colour was back to the way it had always been, a bright, luminescent turquoise. "Yeah," Orion said slowly. "Let's go show mum."

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Discovery

Lucius Malfoy sat at his desk, going over his paperwork when a house elf stumbled into the room and prostrated itself on the floor in front of the desk. "Master," it squeaked.

Lucius pursed his lips. As much as he wanted to ignore the thing, he supposed he should acknowledge it. At least that way it would leave. He finished the letter he was writing, taking his time as he signed his name with a flourish at the bottom of the page before looking up. "Well," he snapped to the elf who was still cowering on the floor, "what is it, Dobby? I don't have all day."

"Professor Dumbledore is at the door, Master. He is wanting to speak with you."

"Tell him I'm a very busy man, and I don't have time to talk with him today."

The elf trembled where it lay. "Dobby does this already, Master. But Professor Dumbledore says he has something urgent he says he is needing to speak about, Master."

Damn meddler. What did he want now? Lucius sighed. "Fine, Dobby. Show him in."

Lucius moved from his desk to the cabinet he stored his alcohol in and poured himself a drink, then stood by the fire to wait for Dumbledore's arrival. He didn't wait long. The normally placid headmaster strode in as though something were biting at his heels. Upon seeing Lucius, he wasted no time.

"Where is he, Lucius?"

Though his heart plummeted at this, none of his emotion showed on his face. Did he perhaps know? No, it simply wasn't possible. He'd been too clever in covering his steps that night… "Him, Dumbledore? Whoever do you mean? I'm afraid I can't help you until I know who you might be talking about."

Though Dumbledore was normally a calm and quiet man, all of those mannerisms seemed to have fallen away. "Do not give me that, Lucius. You know *exactly* who I'm talking about. What have you done with the boy? Is he in good health?" Lucius could see that Dumbledore was on the verge of breaking, and he had never seen such a look in the headmaster's eyes. It was a good thing that he had already made arrangements for the boys to attend Durmstrang. Otherwise…

"I'm sorry, Dumbledore, but I honestly have no idea what boy you are speaking of. The only two boys in this house are my own sons. You have met them before, I believe? Draco and Orion?"

The headmaster waved this aside. "Not those boys, Lucius. I know you have Harry here somewhere. And I *will* find him. With or without your help. If I have to bring in the Ministry on this, you will regret it."

Lucius smiled. "Now, Dumbledore, do calm yourself. You look as though you are about to implode. Can't have that, can we?" Not in Malfoy manor, anyway, Lucius thought to himself. "If you'd like, I can give you a tour of the house, and you will be able to see that the only people here are my family. Would that content you?"

Dumbledore took a slow breath to calm himself. "It…will do. For the moment. But if I am not totally satisfied that you have shown me the *entire* house…"

Lucius slowly smiled, the smile never quite reaching his eyes. "Of course, Dumbledore." He walked to the door, and waited for Dumbledore to follow him.

However, before they could even take a step from the room, Orion and Draco skidded to a stop in front of their father. "We got our letters, father!" Draco waved his letter at his father, but Orion hung back, looking at the tall old man behind their father with wide eyes.

Lucius hid his grimace. "Isn't that…nice," he sneered. "Too bad you will be attending Durmstrang instead."

"Oh, no they will not, Lucius," a cold, clear voice came from further down the hall. Narcissa Malfoy never ran, so she was still making her

way to her husband's study, and was only halfway down the hall, sedately walking from her own room.

Lucius glared at her. "We will discuss this *later*, Narcissa."

"No, Lucius. We will discuss this now. I will *not* allow you to send my sons to the arctic simply to appease your ridiculous pride. Both of our families have gone to Hogwarts for generations. I see no reason that Draco and Orion should not attend there as well."

"They will attend *Durmstrang*, Narcissa. I have already made preparations for their transport at the end of August. The matter is closed."

"And I say that if they do not attend Hogwarts, you will regret it." She stood now, directly in front of Lucius, a slight smile on her face, her arms crossed.

He eyed his wife up and down for a moment. Then he sneered. "Small loss." He turned to Dumbledore. "Follow me." He strode off down the hall, eager to get the headmaster out of his house as soon as he could, ignoring the cold look on his wife’s face.

Dumbledore stood outside the gates to the Manor once more after his whirlwind tour of the estate. There had been no signs of another boy anywhere. Least of all Harry. Luckily, he didn't have to take Lucius Malfoy's word on the matter that he had indeed shown Dumbledore everything there was to see. It was time to find out Harry's exact location so that he could tell the ministry where to look.

He pulled a trinket that he had borrowed from Alastor out of his pocket. It was called a Life Glass. It was a circular piece of glass with a handle attached, rather like a Muggle magnifying glass, but when one looked through it at a building, it revealed the occupants inside. It could tell a general sense of gender, age, and which of many different kinds of species the being was. Dumbledore only hoped it would be able to see where Harry was hidden.

He held the glass up so that he could see the manor through it. Immediately, dots appeared on the surface of the glass. More than a

dozen dots in green and violet appeared in one area, which Dumbledore assumed was the kitchens, and therefore obviously showed the small army of house-elves that ran the household. A red dot was visible in a room on the far right side of the second floor, and a dark blue one seemed to be moving back and forth nearby. Dumbledore smiled to himself. He was sure that by now, Lucius was getting himself into quite a state.

Now Dumbledore looked for the silver dots that indicated young human males. He quickly noticed two, lurking near the room where the elder Malfoys were obviously still discussing their children's' future. He knew these must be Draco and Orion. But where was Harry? Though he scanned every other inch of the manor and its grounds, no other silver dots appeared.

So then where was the boy? Perhaps Lucius had him hidden in his 'secret' dungeon under the manor? And it was shielded from these types of devices? But then how could the owl have gotten to the boy? Dumbledore knew the boy had to have mail access, as the letter had been opened. Dumbledore knew the boy had to be here somewhere. The spell on the letter had proved that. So then where was he?

He examined the portion of the manor where the Malfoys were gathered, and wondered. Had Lucius been telling the truth? Did he truly not know where Harry was? But then why had Dumbledore felt the flash of fear from the man when he had first entered?

And then an idea struck him. Perhaps Dumbledore had paid attention to the wrong lie. Perhaps...perhaps it was time to get a better look at the Malfoy twins.

Dumbledore approached the manor gate once more, smiling.

Lucius ground his teeth silently as he looked at the man in front of him. He could see no way out this time. It would only take a simple spell to confirm that Orion Malfoy was, indeed, Harry Potter. But Lucius would be damned if he would give him up. This boy was his chance. After the Dark Lord had fled, the boy had looked up at Lucius, tears and blood mingled on his chubby face, and Lucius had realized something. If this boy, at one and a half years old, could survive the

deadliest curse in existence, imagine his power at ten, or twenty. And if Lucius were to raise that power…It would be his to control.

So he had taken the boy. A few spells to change his appearance, subtly, of course. A few memory charms, both on healers at St. Mungo's and on Narcissa, to convince them that he had been born grossly underweight, so they had been watching him since his and Draco's birth. And Orion Salazar Malfoy was accepted into the family with no one the wiser.

And now it was all about to fall apart. All because of a meddling old man who couldn't let go.

Dumbledore sighed. "Lucius, I don't want to harm the boy. He obviously seems happy here. And I'm glad of that. But I am afraid that I have to insist that he come to Hogwarts, where I can watch him. I will not take him from here, as long as you are willing to concede me that."

"I see," Lucius managed to choke out. "And if I refuse?"

Dumbledore smiled. But there was no kindness in his eyes.

"Ah, so you don't want to hurt him, but that doesn't mean that you won't, is that it? Perhaps I should tell him that."

"I don't think that would be wise, Lucius. After all, once he learns of your role in all this, he won't exactly be pleased with you." Albus smiled a mischievous smile then. "Besides, it might make your wife a bit more pleased with you if you allowed the boys to attend my school." He stood, and looked down at his former student. "Just think over what I've said. I'll know when I get the boys' responses, won't I?"

After the headmaster had left, Lucius mulled over his choices. He supposed he could take the boy and run. But Lucius didn't feel that he was cut out for the life of a fugitive. But obviously, the boys would not be attending Durmstrang, despite what Lucius wanted. He supposed that he would simply have to step up the boys' training while at home.

Well, there was something he could get from this, at least. He pulled a cord, and a house elf appeared after only a moment. “Master sent for Dobby?”

“Yes, Dobby, go and ask my wife to come here.” He narrowed his eyes, and added, “And don’t take long. I’m sure I could come up with a suitable punishment if I find myself having to wait…” The house-elf blanched and scurried from the room.

Lucius knew this wouldn’t go well. It would look as though he were caving, but it was the only way. Better than to tell her the truth about why he was giving in.

Narcissa took her time appearing, and by the time she had arrived, Lucius had crossed to his alcohol cabinet, and was already on his second glass.

“You want something, Lucius?” she asked in her coldest voice, her arms crossed across her chest.

Lucius steeled himself. Giving in was not something he was good at. It left a bad taste in his mouth. Despite all the alcohol. “I have changed my mind, Narcissa.” Her eyes widened slightly, and her stance relaxed just a bit. “I have thought over your arguments, and decided that it would, indeed be more advantageous to keep the boys closer to home. Then they can come home for more than just the summer holidays.” He tried to smile, but his facial muscles didn’t want to work, so instead his expression turned into a kind of leer. “I will leave it to you to tell them they will, indeed be attending Hogwarts.” He turned from his wife and gulped down the rest of his glass, the bottle still clutched in his other hand, ready for the next round.

«--3--»

Off to Hogwarts

Draco and Orion were in a frenzy. How could they possibly fit everything they wanted to take in one trunk each? And not only that, but all the new stuff that they were required to bring as well? By the time the family went to Diagon Alley to get the boys' school supplies, they had pared it down to the utter necessities: their six most favourite sets of robes, twelve sets of shoes, several stacks of books each, their favourite chess sets, their brooms, and a big box of sweets each.

But once they got to Diagon Alley, they knew that they were going to have to get rid of more. There was so much stuff to take with them. Cauldrons, potion making supplies, books, new robes, and of course their wands. They spent a good half-hour at Madam Malkin's, getting a full wardrobe, and discussed whether these new clothes should replace all of the robes they had already packed. Then they went to get their wands, and spent half of their time snickering behind their hands at the bizarre shopkeeper.

But their amusement was somewhat dampened when Orion finally found the wand suited to him. The shop-keeper, Mr. Ollivander, had looked at Orion oddly when they had entered. But when he finally found the wand for him, his behaviour became even stranger. "How odd…how very odd, indeed." He turned to Narcissa. "You say he is your son, madam?"

Narcissa looked down her nose at him. "Of course he is. Why would you ask such a thing?"

"Nothing, madam. Never mind." But Draco and Orion shot each other a look. Was this about Harry Potter? The boys had not showed their parents the letter that Orion had opened. But it didn't stop them from wondering. Their parents were the same as always, but now the two boys watched their mother's reaction to Ollivander's odd behaviour with curiosity. She seemed annoyed, but completely honest in her reactions to his odd statement. Perhaps it had simply been a mix-up.

After that, they met up with their father who had bought them near-identical eagle owls that they had named after stars in the constellations they were named for. Draco's had been named Thuban, which meant "snake," and Orion had named his Saiph, which meant "sword." They also decided to try to connive to each get Nimbus 2000s out of their father, and were horrified to discover that they wouldn't be allowed brooms at school at all this year.

The rest of the day went swiftly, and that night, despite the fact they had so much to talk about, they fell asleep almost immediately.

Summer passed, and soon it was September first. They boys spent almost no time sleeping the night before. They packed and repacked their trunks several times, each time finding something new that just *had* to go with them. But eventually, they were satisfied, and settled down on Draco's bed, discussing what they would do once they were sorted into Slytherin, and discussing how they could sneak their brooms into Hogwarts.

When morning came, they had as much energy as ever, and drove the house-elves crazy ordering them around to make sure everything they needed was packed into their father's enchanted car. Then they had to wait for hours while their parents slowly got ready, and they were forced by them to eat at least some breakfast before they left for the station.

It was ten thirty when they made it to the station, and Draco and Orion were horrified not to be the first students there. They quickly got onto the train, brushing off their father's admonitions to be good and their mother's hugs so that they could find the best compartment possible. They made themselves comfortable, and soon their friends began to appear. Blaise was first, lugging his trunk, and complaining about how his mother hadn't even bothered to come with him to say goodbye. She was too busy with her latest suitor. Vince and Greg were next, and they immediately slumped in a corner, gazing off into space unless anyone talked to them.

Theodore arrived with news. It seemed he had been studying up on wizarding history, and had noticed that Harry Potter was the same age they were, and would probably be attending this year, if his letter

had reached him. He tried to get the other boys worked up about this, but Draco and Orion, having already discussed the possibility that someone would know Harry Potter was their age, managed to dampen the other boys' enthusiasm by suggesting that Harry Potter had probably been raised as a Muggle, and did they *really* want to hang out with someone who was little better than a Mudblood?

The other boys quickly shook their heads, and soon they were engaged in rounds of exploding snap, which lasted until a woman with a trolley full of sweets came by. Draco and Orion quickly stocked up, and soon the compartment was filled with the contented sound of boys eating.

Afterwards, Draco became stir-crazy, and convinced Orion, Vince and Greg to accompany him on a tour of the train. They glanced into the other compartments, but didn't stop until they reached one where two boys sat quietly together. One was a chubby-faced boy who looked as though he had been crying, and was holding a toad. They had no idea who he could be. Probably some Mudblood. But the other…him, they knew. Perhaps not his name, but his red hair made it obvious. He was a Weasley. Their father had told them all about how the Weasleys had no pride, less money and far too many children.

Draco and Orion looked at each other and grinned. This should be fun. Orion slid open the door, and he and Draco stepped into the compartment, flanked by Vince and Greg. Ignoring the Weasley, Draco stepped up to the chubby-faced boy. "I'm Draco Malfoy, and this is my brother Orion, and these are Crabbe," he gestured to Vince, standing beside him, "and Goyle," he gestured to Greg, standing beside Orion. "We just thought you should know that there are some wizarding families that are better than others." He glanced at the Weasley. "And that if you want to make it very far in the Wizarding world, you would do well to cultivate friendships in the *right* circles."

The boy spluttered, but his companion jumped to his feet, his fists clenched, his ears a bright scarlet. "Are you implying something, *Malfoy*?" he snarled.

Draco smirked and turned to his brother. “Orion, did I imply something?”

Orion grinned back. “I didn’t hear any implications, Draco.”

Draco turned back to the Weasley. “So, no implication. Satisfied?”

“For your information, Malfoy, Neville here knows at least as much about old wizarding blood as you do,” he sneered. “His Gran is one of the most powerful witches of her generation.”

Draco turned from Weasley and back to the boy he had called Neville, a calculating look on his face. “Neville? Neville Longbottom, perhaps?”

“Yes,” squeaked the boy, nearly strangling the toad he held in his terror.

“I’ve met your Gran. But I’ve never seen you before.”

Neville flushed. “I don’t…go out much.”

Draco smirked. “I believe I heard that you were a squib. Is that true?” But he pushed on, not waiting for the other boy’s response. “Of course, if you were, you wouldn’t have gotten your letter to Hogwarts, would you?”

Neville’s eyes were wide as moons as he shook his head.

A sneer spread across Draco’s face. “I guess we’ll find out, won’t we, Longbottom?”

The Weasley, who, if it were possible, was growing ever more incensed by this conversation, had finally had enough. “You leave him alone, Malfoy!”

Draco turned back to him. “You make that sound like a threat, Weasley. Do you *really* want to fight us?”

Weasley took a step towards Draco. “Try me.”

Just as Draco was about to raise his wand, the door to the compartment slid open again. A girl with loads of bushy brown hair stepped in. “Ron, Neville, I found…” She stopped suddenly as she took in the scene. All the boys turned to look at her. “What’s going on in here?”

Orion narrowed his eyes. “Who are you to question us?”

She pulled herself straight. “I’m Hermione Granger, and this is my compartment, too, so if you’re causing a ruckus, I most certainly have the right to question you.” Her eyes glinted with annoyance.

Draco opened his mouth to respond, but Orion waved him away, as if to say, ‘This one’s mine.’ “Granger. I don’t recognize *that* surname. What house were your parents in at Hogwarts?”

Her chin raised. “My parents didn’t attend Hogwarts. I’m Muggle-born.”

Orion felt the sneer spread across his face. “Oh,” he scoffed. “A Mudblood.”

There was an explosion behind him, and he found himself on the floor, Weasley over him, pressing his wand to his throat. “You take that back!” the boy snarled. Greg and Vince pulled him away after a few minutes of tugging at him, but the boy still thrashed towards Orion. “I’ll get you, Malfoy. You’ll be sorry!”

And then another red-headed boy, this one much older than the boy who had attacked him, appeared in the compartment. “Ronald! What are you doing?” Hermione hurried in after him, obviously having gone to fetch him when Weasley had attacked.

Weasley turned to the older boy. “They called Hermione Mudblood, Percy! I couldn’t let them do that!”

The older Weasley glared at the four boys, then back at his brother. “I understand your anger, Ron, but you *have* to learn to control your temper!” He looked at Draco and Orion. “Malfoys, I presume?” Draco nodded for both of them. “Your father will be receiving a very strongly

worded letter from me tonight. Now get back to your own compartment."

Draco stepped forward, sneering. "You can't tell us what to do, Weasley."

The older Weasley thrust his chest out at them, and for the first time, Orion noticed the shiny silver badge there. "Yes, I can, *Malfoy*. I'm a Prefect! Now, get back to your compartment, or I'll make sure you have points taken off, no matter what house you end up in."

Draco, quite annoyed at having his fun cut short, sneered at the older boy, then turned to his brother and their friends. "Come on, I'm sure there are much more interesting people on this train to talk to. Let's get out of here." Then he turned and stormed from the compartment. Seething, he led the way back to their own compartment, and after Orion, Vince and Greg had entered, slammed the door behind him.

"Weasleys." He looked crossly at his brother. "I can't believe it. We're going to have to deal with seven *years* of them!" He flung himself into his seat, and Orion moved to sit next to him, patting him on the arm reassuringly.

"Well, look at the positive side, Draco. There's almost no chance we'll be sorted into the same house, right?"

Draco looked at his brother, calculatingly. "I suppose. I mean, I heard all those Weasley brats have been sorted into Gryffindor so far." He sighed and looked out the window. "I guess we'll just have to see, hm?"

Orion nodded.

The rest of the train journey was quiet. Theodore had gone off in search of another boy he had been hoping would show, Blaise was lost in his book, and Vince and Greg had fallen asleep, snoring loudly. Orion wondered how he would be able to stand sleeping in the same dorm as them for seven years, but maybe he'd get lucky and they'd be sorted into Hufflepuff.

Theo came back shortly before they reached the Hogsmeade station, and the six boys changed and pulled their trunks to a pile in the center of the compartment, then made their way to the exit in the corridor. The platform was a confusing mill of students, most of which were taller than the six of them, but soon they heard a voice calling for the first years, and made their way to the end of the platform where a huge man was gathering all the first years together. Once the platform was empty of everyone but the first years, the giant led them down to a lake, and settled them into boats. The students sat, enraptured by the view of the castle that would be their home for the large part of the next seven years as the boats glided across the lake.

Both Draco and Orion had seen castles before, had even been in it a few times. But this was nothing like that. Seeing it this way showed them just how immense the castle was. It was quite impressive. The two boys grinned at each other, just imagining all the trouble they would be able to get into.

The boats bumped against the shore, and the first-years got out, stumbling a bit from still straining to see the castle, which had mostly disappeared behind the camouflage of an ivy-coated wall. The Giant led them up a staircase, and to a large door set into the wall. He knocked on the door, and it opened to reveal a stern, grey-haired witch. “Ferst-years, Professor McGonagall.”

“Thank you, Hagrid, I’ll take them from here.” She motioned the students to follow her and led them into a small room. When they had all entered, she turned to address them. “Welcome to Hogwarts school of witchcraft and wizardry. In a moment, you will be sorted into your houses. While you are here, your houses will be like your families. You will be able to earn points for your house, and any rule-breaking will cause you to lose points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points will be awarded the house cup.

“I will be back in a moment to lead you into the hall where you will be sorted.” She glanced around the room, glaring at a few, slightly messy students standing here and there in the crowd. “I suggest you smarten yourselves up while you wait.” She then turned and left the room.

The students rustled around nervously, and they were all startled when a flock of ghosts entered the room, quickly gliding out through the opposite wall taking little notice of the students. Once they had disappeared, they noticed that the Professor had reappeared. “Follow me,” she said. The students lined up behind her in two rows. Draco and Orion walked next to each other, Vince and Greg in front of them, and Blaise and Theo behind them.

They entered the hall, and Orion found himself horrified by the number of people already seated. He had never seen so many people in one place at one time. Certainly, he had attended a few of his parent’s parties, but most of those were intimate gatherings, and even the larger parties had never had this many people attending. Draco, hearing his brother’s breathing grow shallow, glanced at him, then took his hand and whispered under his breath, “It’s okay, Orion. You’ll be fine.”

Orion smiled over at his brother. “Thanks,” he whispered.

When they reached the front of the hall, the professor lined them up facing the rest of the students in the hall, and for the first time the first-years noticed an old, ragged hat on a stool. The rest of the school stared at the hat expectantly. And then they found out why when a rip in the brim opened into a mouth, and it began to sing.

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,

But don't judge on what you see,

I'll eat myself if you can find

A smarter hat than me.

You can keep your bowlers black,

Your top hats sleek and tall,

For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat

And I can cap them all.

There's nothing hidden in your head

The Sorting Hat can't see,

So try me on and I will tell you

Where you ought to be.

You might belong in Gryffindor,

Where dwell the brave at heart,

Their daring, nerve, and chivalry

Set Gryffindors apart;

You might belong in Hufflepuff,

Where they are just and loyal,

Those patient Hufflepuffis are true

And unafraid of toil;

Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,

If you've a ready mind,

Where those of wit and learning,

Will always find their kind;

Or perhaps in Slytherin

You'll make your real friends,

Those cunning folk use any means

To achieve their ends.

So put me on! Don't be afraid!

And don't get in a flap!

You're in safe hands (though I have none)

For I'm a Thinking Cap!"

The hall applauded, and then the Professor began to call out names. As students began to be sorted, Orion's stomach began to churn. What if he didn't get into Slytherin? Worse, what if he and Draco were in different houses? Or the sorting hat decided that he wasn't Orion Malfoy, but Harry Potter, and yelled it to the entire school?

Draco watched his brother as the sorting continued. He had never seen Orion this shaken before. Orion was always quiet, but after receiving the letter for Harry Potter, he'd been much more quiet than usual. And if Draco knew his brother, he was probably worrying himself to death. Perhaps he could bribe the hat to make sure they ended up in the same house? He didn't know what would happen if they got separated.

Vince was called, and sorted into Slytherin, and shortly after, Greg was as well. Draco could see Orion tensing as the last names got closer to the M's. Part of Draco was glad that he was going to be sorted first, so that he couldhave a little talk with the sorting hat, but another part of him wanted to stand here and hold Orion's hand until he was sorted, so that he could follow after and tell the hat to put him in whatever house Orion ended up in, even if they did end up in Hufflepuff.

And then there was no more waiting. "Malfoy, Draco!" the Professor called. He hurried to the stool and pulled the hat onto his head.

"Oh, a new Malfoy."

"Yes, but I have something to ask you," Draco said to the hat.

"You really are a Slytherin, aren't you?"

Draco braced himself. "Not if my brother's not."

“Brother? There’s another Malfoy this year? That’s unusual. And unexpected.”

“My twin brother, actually. What will it take to get you to sort him into my house?”

He could feel the hat chuckle. “And how do I know that he would fit into your house? Perhaps he would do better in another?”

“He wouldn’t! If he’s not in Slytherin with me, they might as well send him home. And me, too.” Draco braced himself for refusal.

“I will give it some thought.” Then, Draco heard the hat call out “Slytherin!” to the rest of the school, and he jumped off the stool, but didn’t move off to his house table. He refused to move until he heard the hat’s decision on Orion. If it didn’t sort him into Slytherin, Draco would insist upon being re-sorted.

Orion stepped carefully to the stool, and placed the hat on his head. It was there for a long time, and Draco’s heart began to pound. Slytherin, Slytherin, Slytherin, he began to chant to himself. And then it was over. “Slytherin!” the hat shouted, and Draco ran towards his brother, a grin on his face, and the two boys ran to sit next to Vince and Greg.

Theodore soon followed them, and eventually Blaise did as well. Then it was time for the feast. The boys stuffed themselves, and brothers felt as though nothing could go wrong, now that they were in Slytherin.

«--4--»

Orion Malfoy, Meet Harry Potter

Once the feast was over, the headmaster made a few announcements, but Orion found himself staring at the old man. Did *he* know? He hadn't said one word to him the entire time he had visited the day they had opened the letter. But occasionally, during the feast, he had noticed the old man looking at him with an odd glint in his eyes.

When the announcements were done, the entire school sang the school song. It was horrible. No two people used the same tune, and it lasted far too long for Orion's taste, but then it was finally over, and the entire school got to their feet to leave. Unfortunately, Orion was stopped by a hand on his shoulder.

Professor Snape stood behind him, smirking. "Mr. Malfoy. The headmaster would like to talk with you."

Orion glanced at Draco, who had stepped closer to him when he had noticed Snape's appearance. Snape was an old family friend, but the expression on his face, and their strange new surroundings made that hard to remember. Draco raised his chin. "If he wants to see Orion, I'm going, too."

The sneer broadened. "The headmaster assumed that you would say that, Mr. Malfoy. You are more than welcome to accompany us." Snape turned on his heel, and without looking back to see if they were following, stormed off to the door near the teacher's table. Draco grabbed his brother's hand. "Everything will be okay, Orion. I won't let him do anything to you."

Orion smiled, but it did not reach his eyes. They hurried off after Snape, following him down several corridors, and getting lost in the process, finally finding themselves in front of a stone gargoyle set into the wall. Snape snapped out, "Licorice whips," and the gargoyle jumped aside, revealing a staircase. He motioned the boys forward, and the moment they stepped on the stairs, the staircase began to move upward. At the top, they found themselves facing a door. Snape knocked on it, opened the door, and ushered the boys in.

“Here they are, headmaster.”

The old man smiled, but Orion’s stomach rolled over. Whatever he wanted, it couldn’t be good, could it? Why else would he need to see him their first day here? “Thank you, Severus, I will take them down to their common room myself.” Snape scowled at being dismissed, but still turned and left the room. The headmaster turned his eyes on Draco and Orion. “Please, boys, sit down. I have a lot to tell you. I realize you are probably both exhausted with your adventures today, but this is important.”

Draco glared at him, but held his tongue for the moment. This was the headmaster, after all. It wouldn’t do to be expelled for being too snide their first day here.

The headmaster looked searchingly at Orion for a moment before continuing. “Orion, by any chance, did you receive a letter for Hogwarts addressed to someone else?” The boys looked at each other, horrified. How did he know? And if he’d known, why hadn’t he talked to them when he had come to Malfoy Manor? Draco could tell his brother was unsure, so he took his hand again and nodded once.

Orion looked up at the headmaster. “Yes, sir,” he said in a quiet voice. Then he rushed on. “I knew it wasn’t right, ‘cause it did have someone else’s name on it, but…”

“Orion,” the headmaster interrupted. “It went to the person it was sent to,” he said calmly.

Orion’s eyes grew big, and he clutched Draco’s hand tighter.

“That letter was carefully enspelled so only the person who it was addressed to would receive it. And only the person it was addressed to would be able to i *open /i* it, Orion.”

Orion gulped. “What are you saying, sir?” Draco could feel his brother’s trembling growing stronger. They had talked about the letter, but he had mostly passed it off as some kind of joke. Apparently, Orion had taken it much more seriously.

“You did open the letter, did you not?”

The boys blinked. Then Draco sneered. “Oh, good joke, sir.” He stood, and pulled on his brother’s hand. “Come on, Orion. We’re leaving. Father’s right. Dumbledore’s a crackpot.” But Orion didn’t move.

“And if I did?”

Dumbledore smiled consolingly. “Then you already know the truth.”

Orion’s heartbeat sped up. “Which is?”

The headmaster leaned forward. “That *you* are Harry Potter. Not Orion Malfoy as you have been led to believe.”

Orion was stunned. But not so Draco. He let go of his brother’s hand. “Shut up, you lying sack of dung! Orion is my brother, not The-Boy-Who-Went-Missing. And if you say otherwise, you’re lying!” Draco’s voice was louder than Orion had ever heard it before. Draco *never* raised his voice.

“Draco, it’s okay. I can handle this.” Orion looked at Dumbledore. “Why…” He stopped, then started again. “How is this possible, sir?”

Dumbledore sighed. “I’m not entirely clear on that myself, Orion. Your father and I talked after I discovered your…identity. And he and I agreed on several things. You seem quite happy, Orion. Is that true?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I don’t want to take you away from a family you care about, Orion. I want you to be happy.”

Orion grabbed Draco’s hand once more. “I am, sir. I can’t imagine what life would be like without Draco, or Mother, or Father.”

“I’m glad to hear it. But your father and I came to a little agreement, Orion. While you’re here, I promise not to divulge who you are until you are ready, and you are allowed to stay with your family, and in Slytherin. But I would like you to make a few friends outside of your house. I have already set up a meeting spot, and have asked the other heads of houses to invite some first years to meet you.”

“But, sir…” Draco seemed upset by this pronouncement.

“I’m sorry, Draco, if you feel this is unfair, but I’m afraid I must insist. You are invited to come along, but I ask that you bring no one else to these meetings until you have found friends in at least one of these houses.”

Draco glared at the headmaster. “And what’s wrong with having friends *only* in Slytherin?”

“There is nothing *wrong* with it, Draco, but your ‘brother’ needs to have a broader view of the wizarding world than your house would be able to give him.” He looked at Orion, who seemed lost in thought. “Is this all right, Orion?”

“I…suppose so, sir.” Orion looked up to meet his gaze. “Is that all, sir?”

“Just one more thing. Lucius asked that I give this to you. I haven’t read it, but I think it may explain a few things.” He handed Orion a large parchment envelope with the Malfoy crest on the front. Orion ran his fingers across the parchment, feeling horribly detached from the green and silver “M” that had been his family crest for longer than he could remember.

“Thank you, sir.” He stood, still not looking at Draco.

Dumbledore sighed. “Well, I should show you both to your common room now. If you’ll follow me…” He stood, and led the boys from his office.

As they walked, Draco tried to get his brother’s attention, but Orion was deeply lost in thought. They followed the Headmaster down into the dungeons and to a blank space of wall where Snape waited for them.

“Headmaster.”

“Severus, if you would settle the boys in.”

Snape nodded, waited until the headmaster had departed, then turned to the boys. “Remember, both of you, whatever happens, you are more than welcome to come to me about *anything*. Is that understood?”

The boys nodded, then Snape turned to the wall, said “Pureblood,” the wall cracked open and he ushered the boys into a large stone room done up in shades of green, silver and black. “This is your common room, and your dorm is marked ‘First-years,’ and is down the left-hand passage. The Prefects will help you to your first classes tomorrow, but after that you are on your own. I expect you both to live up to the Malfoy name. If I *ever* find out anything that causes me to take points from this house, I *will* be writing a letter to your father. Do we understand each other?”

The boys nodded, then Draco pulled Orion down the hall. The room was smaller than their bedrooms at home, and was already filled with Vince, Greg, Theo and Blaise’s snores. Their beds were on the far end of the room, right next to each other. Draco changed into his nightclothes, then turned to look at his brother, who still stood next to his bed, staring down at the letter Dumbledore had given him. He crawled onto Orion’s bed and pulled him down so he was sitting next to Draco. “Are you going to read it, or just stare at it all night?” he asked.

“Dunno.” Orion bit his lip and looked up at Draco. He had never seen the worry he now saw in his brother’s face. “What…what if it’s true, Draco?” His lower lip trembled. “I don’t want to be someone else! I want to be your brother!”

Draco quieted him. “Shush. You’ll wake the others. It doesn’t matter, Ori. No matter what, no matter who you *really* are, you’ll *always* be my brother. Okay?”

Orion nodded.

Draco grinned, but it was a feeble grin. “So, you gonna open it?”

Orion nodded, but inside all he could think of was the last time Draco had goaded him into opening an envelope. He took a deep breath.

This was from his father. How bad could it be? He put his finger under the flap, and opened the letter.

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The Boy Who Lived

Orion,

I must first say that, no matter what else you read in this letter, you must believe that you are *my son, adopted, legal or not. Though making you my son was a split-second decision, I have* never *regretted it. Having you in our family made all our lives better. I'm sure that Draco would tell you that. Never let anyone tell you that you are not a Malfoy, Orion. You are. You always will be.*

Having said that, I have to apologize for keeping all this from you for so long. I am sure Dumbledore has told you by now: you are Harry Potter. You are The Boy Who Disappeared. I won't excuse my role in destroying the life you might have had with the Potters. It is inexcusable. So, instead, I will tell you that, yes, I took you from the ruin of your parents' home after the Dark Lord killed them.

--flashback, October 31, 1981--

The rest of the Death Eaters stood petrified in place. They had waited several minutes for Voldemort to re-emerge from the wreckage of the Potters' home. The moment the house had imploded, Pettigrew had run off somewhere, and now others Death Eaters were beginning to follow him, apparating in ones and twos. They were cowards, all of them, too afraid of what might happen next.

But Lucius sneered at their cowardice. He wasn't afraid. If his master was in that wreckage, Lucius needed to help him, not run away. After all, surely the Dark Lord would reward him for his help, wouldn't he? And then he would be the Dark Lord's greatest supporter. He smiled at the thought as he started down the hill.

As he approached the house, all he could hear was the screams of a child. Had the Dark Lord been defeated, then? Had the Potters defeated him? But when he reached the rubble, he could clearly see the two prone bodies of a man and a woman. And a third, smaller body of a child—which was *moving*. Lucius's mind spun. This *boy* had defeated the Dark Lord? Lucius looked down at him, bawling at

the top of his lungs, draped across his dead mother's body, and an idea came to him. If the boy could defeat the most powerful Dark Wizard ever, surely he would be even more powerful when he grew up. And if Lucius were to *raise* him…

Lucius smiled down at the boy. It would only take a few spells here and there to convince people that Narcissa had had twins. And a few more to change his appearance enough to make him look like a Malfoy.

He picked up the child, hiding him under his cloak just as he heard a rumble from the sky behind him. Someone was coming. It was time to leave. And he apparated away.

--end of flashback--

I don't expect you to understand, Orion. But I wanted to bring you into our family so your talents could be brought out. Had Dumbledore and his *ilk gotten their hands on you, you would have been raised with little to no knowledge of just how powerful you are. You are one of the most powerful wizards currently in existence, Orion. And because of that, I am proud.*

Your hair and eyes, as I'm sure you are aware, are not their natural colours. I figured that the best way to keep you with us was to make you look like one of us. It took me a few days to get the colouring just right. But the spells on them are simple, and we can remove them whenever you wish. But only when you feel ready. Don't let anyone push you into changing, Orion.

One more thing. Your mother does not know. I cast a spell on her so that she would believe you were our son. Blame none of this on her. She is as innocent in this as you.

--flashback, November 3, 1981--

Lucius entered Narcissa's suite. "Narcissa, darling. Look who's come home! It's our little Orion. The healers have finally released him. They say he's finally strong enough to survive on his own."

Narcissa looked up from the book she was reading, a puzzled expression on her face. “What on earth are you talking about, Lucius? Who is Orion?”

Lucius stepped next to his wife, and placed the bundle in her arms. Thick silver blonde hair covered the head of the boy who lay there, and blue green eyes looked up at her expectantly. As she looked down at the boy in her arms, Lucius moved his wand just out of her line of sight, casting a wordless spell on her as she looked down at the boy, and when she looked back up at Lucius, still slightly confused, he began to speak. This was the easy part. At the moment, she would believe whatever story he told her, and for her, it would become absolute truth. He’d already dealt with the midwife and a few select healers at St. Mungos. And the spells on the boy’s hair and eyes were perfect. He could not look more like a Malfoy if he *had* been Draco’s twin.

“Don’t you remember, darling? He’s Draco’s twin brother. He was so underweight when he and Draco were born that the midwife took him straight to St. Mungos for us. We’ve been visiting him every few weeks, my love. But the healers say he’s finally healthy enough to stay with us.” He smiled down at his wife, and watched as the puzzled expression turned to one of delight.

“He’s finally home? Oh, Lucius, that’s wonderful! We’ll have to set up the room right next to Draco’s so that when they’re older they’ll never have to be far from one another.”

“Of course, my love. I’ve already arranged it.”

Narcissa looked down on the boy again, smiling. “Oh, Lucius. I’m so glad he’s finally home. There were some days I wondered if I’d ever see him again…”

Lucius nodded. “I know, my love. But it’s all over. He’s home. Shall we show Draco his ‘little brother?’”

“I think that would be wonderful.” She stood, the boy still in her arms, and together they strode from the room.

--end of flashback--

I realize that after reading all this, that you will probably be furious with me. As I said, I give no excuses. I honestly think you are better in the life I made for you than the one Dumbledore would have given you. I am proud to call you a Malfoy. I am proud to call you my son.

Lucius Malfoy

Orion finished the letter, and folded it in his lap. It was true. Everything Dumbledore had told him was true. *He* was Harry Potter, The Boy Who Had Disappeared. *He* had defeated the Dark Lord. He was not a Malfoy. Not Draco's brother. Everything in his life was a lie.

When he looked up, Draco was still watching him. His eyes were huge. He'd obviously read the letter over Orion's shoulders this time. He looked scared. "Ori?"

Orion's eyes closed. Maybe if he pretended, it wouldn't be true any more… "We need sleep, Drake. We can talk about it tomorrow." But, as he got into his pyjamas, he hoped he'd never have to think about it again. Perhaps tomorrow, all this would just turn out to be a bad dream. Perhaps he'd receive a letter from father saying that it had all been a very bad joke; of course he was a Malfoy; it was ludicrous to suggest Orion could possibly be anything else.

But he couldn't shake the sudden image of a flash of green light, and a high-pitched cackle. That recurring dream of his suddenly made a lot more sense. Orion snuggled down into his green comforter, listening as Draco's breathing slowly quieted into sleep over on his own bed, but it was a long time before he fell asleep himself.

/6\

The Squib and the Blood-Traitor

The next day, Orion tried to forget about the “truth” and just focus on his first day of classes. At least he had all his classes with Draco, so he wouldn’t be on his own. Their first class was very daunting. Transfiguration with the witch who had led them into the sorting. Professor McGonagall. She was quite stern, and frowned around at them as she spoke.

“I expect your full concentration in this class. Transfiguration is a difficult art to learn, and you will not truly understand its full value until well into your sixth or seventh year. Despite this, I expect *everyone* in this class to perform to the best of their ability, and to ask for help as soon as it is needed, rather than after it is already too late.”

Then she passed out a pack of matchsticks, and showed the class how to turn them into needles and back. Draco was able to make his pointy, and Orion’s even went a bit grey, but they were the best in the class. The only other student who was able to do much to their matchstick was Blaise, and his spent more time spinning around on the desk from him pushing at it with his wand.

Herbology was next, and the Slytherins were bored to tears as a group as Professor Sprout explained just how important plants were in magic, and how they would be learning all about magical species of plants, how to tend for them and how to prepare them and storing them once they were picked.

Vince got into a bit of trouble when he wandered off to the back of the greenhouse while the Professor was speaking, and prodded at several of the plants. Unfortunately for him, one of them prodded back, and Sprout ended up having to dismiss the class and escort him up to the Hospital wing with a bloody lip.

Unfortunately, this meant that Orion had almost two hours with nothing to occupy him. He found himself back in his dorm, looking down at the letter Dumbledore had given him.

Should he respond? If he did, what did he want to say? How could he possibly say what he wanted to to the man who had raised him as a son for ten years? Draco entered the dorm, and plopped down on Orion's bed.

"Vince is okay. He's already back. Some of the other Slytherins are thinking of throwing a party for him for getting us out of Herbology so quick. What do you think, Ori?"

"Not right now, Drake."

"Are you still on about that letter? I told you, it doesn't matter what that crackpot says. You're my brother, no matter what."

Orion felt his throat tighten. "But they both say it, Draco. Dumbledore and Father. Maybe I might agree with you if it was just Dumbledore, but why would father admit to something like that?"

"Dumbledore probably faked the note. We know he was at the estate! He probably stole some of father's parchment and wrote the letter himself."

"Well, I should write him, and find out. Maybe I'll skip lunch and work on it."

"You sure? I'm starving. I can't imagine that you're not hungry."

"I'm not, Draco. Leave me alone. I'll be fine."

"All right. If you say so. Will I see you at lunch, or will you still be brooding?"

Orion's eyes snapped to his brother, and he snorted. "I'm *not* brooding."

"Oh? What *would* you call it, then?"

Orion narrowed his eyes. "Leave it alone, already. I'll see you next class, okay?"

Draco sighed. “You gonna be okay?”

“I’ll be fine, Draco. Go have fun. I need to think, and I can’t do it with you pestering me!”

Draco stood, uncertain for a moment, then nodded and left.

Orion rolled over onto his back. Now that Draco was gone, he wasn’t sure he *wanted* to be alone. But he had to think about it sometime, didn’t he? Perhaps he should write to father. That would give him something to focus on, at least.

He got up and moved to his desk, pulling out a piece of parchment with a small M insignia in the left-hand corner, and his favorite bottle of green ink. Then he paused. What, exactly should he say? He started several times.

Father,

Dumbledore told me the oddest thing…

No, just wrong.

I was wondering. Am I adopted?

God, he couldn’t say that!

Father, were you in Godric’s Hollow the night of Halloween in 1981?

Ha! Like he’d answer that.

Father, Dumbledore gave me a letter that I would like to confirm with you.

Still not perfect, but it was something.

He said it was from you, and after reading it, I need to know if its contents are accurate. Dumbledore says that I am not a Malfoy. He says…

But what *did* Dumbledore say? He certainly hadn't said much. He had said that he was Harry Potter, but did Orion truly believe that?

He says that I am not who you have always told me I am. If this letter that he has given me is, in fact from you…

Again, Orion was at a loss. What *did* he want? What could possibly make *any* of this better, if that letter was true?

He crumpled up the first sheet, threw it aside, and started again.

Father,

Dumbledore told me and Draco something that I need to tell you about. He has told me some things that I find hard to believe. And then he gave me a letter that he claimed was from you. Did you give him a letter to give to me, father? I am having trouble believing the letter is from you.

If you would answer this quickly, I would appreciate it.

Your son,

Orion Malfoy

There. That should do it. Right?

Before Orion could change his mind again, he hurried to the owlery and sent Saiph off with the letter.

Feeling sure that he would hear from his father within a day, and knowing that he had already missed lunch, he hurried off to find his next class. Charms. Draco was already there, and when he saw Orion, he scooted over so his brother could sit down. Charms was interesting. Professor Flitwick showed them several examples, and they looked to Orion like they would actually be quite easy to learn.

Orion and Draco were looking quite forward to their next class. They figured they were probably the best prepared students at Hogwarts

for the class. What they hadn't counted on was being more prepared than the teacher. Professor Quirrell was a jittering, nervous wreck. When he got to Draco and Orion's names while he was calling roll, he nearly fainted. Draco giggled, but Orion was horrified. How could a weakling like that teach them anything?

At dinner, Orion received an owl, and thinking that it was his father's reply, despite the fact that it wasn't his owl, he quickly ripped it open. It wasn't from his father, though. It was from the headmaster.

Dear Misters Malfoy,

I hope that your first day at school went well. I have arranged your first "get together" for tonight. I hope you will both be up to attending. To keep these meetings from interfering with your schoolwork, I will limit them to only two a week, one on Monday, and one on Friday. If you find that this will not work, please see myself or Professor Snape about this, and we will arrange a new meeting time more in line with your schedule. Snape will escort you tonight, and from then on, you are expected to find your way on your own.

Fondly,

Professor Albus Dumbledore

Orion looked up at his brother, horrified.

Draco, in the midst of chewing a mouthful, glanced at him curiously. "What?"

"I'd forgotten…"

"Forgotten what?" Orion shoved the letter at him. He scanned the letter. "Tonight?" he whined. "But Vince's party is tonight! We even bribed a sixth-year to go to Hogsmeade and get us some butterbeer! We can't miss the party." Then he looked up at Orion's face. He was white.

Draco wanted to rant now. This really wasn't fair. Orion couldn't be The Boy Who Disappeared. He just couldn't. Right? Why were they doing this to him? He pulled himself closer to his brother, and

wrapped an arm around him. “Don’t worry, Ori. I’m sure it won’t take us long. And then we can come in when the party’s in full swing, and I’m sure there will still be a few bottles for us…”

Orion nodded, weakly. At least he didn’t have to go alone. That would have been a thousand times worse.

Snape arrived at a quarter to eight, scowl firmly in place. “Follow me.” He turned, and strode down the corridor, and the boys had to run to keep up. They followed him up a flight of stairs, and then down another passage, till they arrived at a small door in an otherwise empty corridor. Snape snapped “Friendshp,” a sneer quite evident in his voice, then opened the door, and waved the boys in. It was a small lounge, not much bigger than their dorm room, filled with a couple of comfy looking couches, and a large table surrounded by eight chairs. There was also a fireplace, that had apparently been recently lit.

But there were no students there at all. The boys turned to look at Snape.

“I brought you here early so I could explain to you exactly what the headmaster expects. You are to stay here at least one hour. You will be meeting each time with two students from the other houses, though once you begin to make friends,” here Snape sneered, “you will be able to invite them to return the next time. The headmaster is hoping that you will make friends from each of the houses, and though he will not specifically be checking on you, you should be aware that he knows *everything* that goes on in this castle. That means: no sneaking out early, no snogging,” here the boys made faces at each other. Why would they want to snog with *anyone*? “And most importantly, *no fighting*. Are we clear?”

The boys nodded.

“I believe that tonight, you will be meeting a couple of boys from Gryffindor. I do apologize for this, but the headmaster insisted. You will be pleased to know, at least, that they *are* purebloods, so you don’t have to worry about that yet.” He cleared his throat, and seemed to be waiting for them to ask questions. When none were forthcoming, he spoke one last time. “The password is something

you should keep to yourselves, and those you trust *implicitly.* You should change it frequently, but not too often. If you have no questions, then, I think I will depart before the, ah, *Gryffindors* get here…" And with that, he turned on his heel once more, and strode from the room.

The boys looked at each other, then sat down to wait. Orion stared off into space, obviously worried, and Draco was just about to try to comfort him, when two boys came through the still-opened door. Two very familiar boys. Weasley and Longbottom. Draco narrowed his eyes. "Weasley. Longbottom."

Weasley stood in the doorway. He obviously wasn't much happier about being here. "Malfoys…" his voice was flat.

Orion looked up, horrified. Dumbledore couldn't have possibly chosen worse. A blood-traitor and a near-squib? What was he thinking? Then he heard Draco speak again.

"Well, come in, Weasley, Longbottom. We don't bite. Not the *first* time, anyway." The smirk was firmly in place.

Longbottom squeaked, but entered the room, sitting as far from the brothers as possible. Weasley followed behind, slower, his eyes never leaving Draco's.

"So," Draco drawled. "What are we supposed to talk about? Your mum popping out any more babies, Weasley?"

Weasley snarled, "Why, your dad run out of food again?"

Draco stepped towards Weasley, but Orion restrained him. "Don't you talk about our dad, Weasley. You don't know him." Orion turned to his brother. "And you heard what Snape said. No fighting."

Draco's eyes snapped with rage. "You heard what he said, Ori. He insulted father. Are you just going to let that stand?"

"You insulted his mother first, Draco. Let it go." Then he turned back to Weasley. Just because he'd defended him, didn't exactly mean he liked him. What the heck was he supposed to say to someone he

had no common ground with? Perhaps…Quidditch? “You into Quidditch, Weasley?” he asked warily.

“Yeah. Why?”

“Well, we can’t sit here and glare at each other for an hour. Unless you can think of something else to talk about, we might as well talk about Quidditch.”

Weasley’s jaw set, but he plunked down on the couch next to Longbottom. “Fine. What’s your team?”

The conversation took off from there. Draco and Weasley got into an argument, but this time with a great deal less hostility, about which team was better, the Wasps or the Cannons, with Draco swearing up and down that no one in their right mind could ever think that the Wasps were truly second-string, while Weasley swore that someday soon, the Cannons’ day would come. This soon evolved into an agreement that the no-first-years-on-the-Quidditch-team rule was preposterous, which then became a plot to find a way to sneak their own brooms onto campus so that they could at least keep in practice for their second year, when they were all, aside from Longbottom, determined to get onto their respective teams.

Longbottom was quiet through most of this, though he did mention owning a Ludo Bagman signed robe that he had gotten from a cousin once for Christmas.

Orion was shocked to realize that their hour was well up, and that they actually needed to hurry to get back to their common rooms before curfew began. They said their goodbyes, and after Weasley and Longbottom disappeared, they reset the lock on the door, and hurried off to the dungeons. If all of their “meetings” went like that, Orion decided, perhaps this might not be so bad after all.

/7\

A Little Knowledge

The next day there were more new classes to attend. After a while, the classes began to blur together. But at lunchtime, Orion looked up as the owls swooped in to deliver their packages and letters. No Saiph. Oh, well. Perhaps tomorrow.

But there was no letter the next morning, either, and Orion began to wonder if he would even get a response from his father. Their first class of the day was History, and from what Orion and Draco had heard, there was not much to look forward to. And what they'd heard was right. Draco's eyes were glazed by Binns's first sentence, and Orion found it quite difficult to stay awake himself. When the bell rang, the entire class jumped, then scurried to pack their bags so they could escape the stifling room.

Draco and Orion walked quickly to their next class, and, still recovering from the stupor of Binns's class, sat transfixed until lunchtime. Orion was so relieved to escape classes for the morning, that he forgot all about waiting for Saiph to appear. So, when she swooped down and landed by his goblet, he was startled enough to knock it over. The liquid spilled out onto the table, and dripped down into several people's laps before he could stop it. He quickly mopped up the mess, receiving glares from Blaise and Millicent, then turned to his owl.

"Hey, Saiph!" he grinned. He pulled the letter off her leg, gave her a piece of ham, and then left the hall to read what his father had written. Draco, worried about his brother, followed closely behind, trailed by Vince and Greg. When they arrived at the common room, Orion plopped onto one of the couches in front of the fire, and began to read.

My Dear Orion,

I did indeed give your Headmaster the letter you received. Everything in it is completely true. I realize this is a shock to you, and I am sorry you had to find out this way. Given time, I

would have been able to soften the blow for you, but Dumbledore gave me no choice, so you had to learn through a letter.

I have decided to come up to Hogwarts to visit this weekend. I would like to see how you and your brother are settling in. And we can speak more about this then.

Your father,

Lucius Malfoy

Horrified, Orion did not react when Draco snatched the letter from his hands. “What did he say, Ori?”

“True…”

Draco glanced away from the letter to look at his brother’s face. “Ori?” Orion was shaking, as though the room were freezing. “Ori? Are you okay?”

Orion couldn’t talk any more. His teeth were chattering so hard that the words could not pass his tongue.

Draco glared up at Vince and Greg. “Damn it, don’t just stand there, you big lumps! Get a teacher! Get Snape, or the hospital matron. Anybody!” Then he settled down next to Orion, and draped his cloak over him to try and warm him. Orion clung to him, the only sound coming from him a chattering of his teeth.

Vince returned moments later with Snape in tow. Snape swooped down on Orion, and began to examine him. “How long has he been like this, Draco?”

“A few minutes, sir. Since he read this letter from father.”

Snape glanced at the letter. He lifted Orion in his arms, then turned to Draco. “Bring the letter. I’ll want to see it once we’ve gotten your brother to the Hospital wing.” Then he strode quickly from the room, Vince and Draco following quickly behind.

When they arrived, the Matron already had a bed ready, and Greg was hovering nearby, obviously uncertain as to what he should do next. When Draco entered the room, he quickly moved to his side. The Matron waved Snape to put Orion on the bed. “Professor, what happened? Mr. Goyle here just told me that Mr. Malfoy was taken ill…” she gasped when she saw how the boy was shivering, then proceeded to cover him with blankets, and began to go through her medicine cabinet.

“I’m not too sure myself, though it definitely looks like shock.” The Matron nodded in response to this, and continued to go through the cabinet, pulling out several bottles and packages to use to calm the stricken boy. Snape turned now to Draco. “Draco, that letter, please?” Draco handed him the letter, and he scanned it quietly, then gazed down at Orion, now being treated by the nurse. He pursed his lips, then looked back at Draco. “Do you know what this letter is talking about, Draco? We need to know, so we can understand what set this off.”

However, before Draco could respond, the headmaster had appeared. “That will not be necessary, Severus. You can get to your class. I’ll handle the boys.” He turned to Draco. “I assume you would like to stay with your brother?” Draco nodded. Dumbledore turned to Vince and Greg and shooed them off to their next class. He turned back to Snape, who still stood by Orion’s bed, his eyes narrowed at the Headmaster.

“Is there something else you needed, Severus?”

Snape’s nostrils flared. “Can I ask what this is about, Headmaster?”

Dumbledore smiled quietly. “I am afraid that it is a private family matter, Severus. I will make sure to inform you when it is necessary. Anything else?”

Snape clenched his jaw. “No, Headmaster.” He handed the letter to Draco, then swept past the headmaster and stormed from the room.

That evening, after Orion and Draco had returned to their common room, Dumbledore sat in his office, composing a letter to Lucius Malfoy when Snape stormed into the room.

“I want to know what is going on with Orion Malfoy, and I want to know *now*, Albus. These boys are in my house, and if I should expect something like that again, I need to know. You can’t expect me to be able to help these boys if I’m in the dark about something as serious about whatever caused what happened today.”

“Severus, calm yourself. Everything is under control. Orion is fine.”

Snape growled, “Until the next time, don’t you mean? Damn it, Albus! I know something is going on here. You can’t keep this from me for long.”

“Severus, sit down.”

Snape glared at the headmaster for several more minutes before seating himself.

“This is not my secret to tell. I assume you read the letter?”

Snape glowered, but nodded.

“Then you can see for yourself that you will be able to ask Lucius on Saturday. I’m afraid for purposes of protecting Orion, that I cannot tell you anything until Lucius Malfoy agrees.”

“I see. And if Lucius refuses, or this happens again while I am still in the dark?”

“I will do my utmost to make sure that doesn’t occur.”

“I will hold you to that, Albus. If anything happens to that boy, I will hold you personally responsible.” Snape stood, glared at the headmaster, and left the room.

Dumbledore smiled to himself, wondering what Snape would think if he knew precisely whose son he was defending.

The rest of the week went swiftly. Orion followed Draco from class to class, barely responding to anything anyone said to him. By Friday morning, he seemed to Draco to be returning to normal just a bit. He had eaten more than toast, and had actually laughed when Draco

had pointed out that Longbottom looked like he was about ready to run back home to his gran.

There was also the fact that Friday morning, they would be having their first Potions lesson. Draco and Orion had been looking forward to potions class since they had discovered when they were six that "Uncle Sev," as they knew him, was the Potions Master at Hogwarts. He had told them to study extra hard so that they would be his best pupils. "After all," he growled, "I have to have at least some students that actually understand what I'm talking about." The boys had received dozens of potions books from him over the years for Christmas and birthday presents, and had done their best to commit them to memory, as they had not been allowed to make potions at home.

So, with Orion's recovery, and Potion's class to look forward to, the day was looking up. The problem was, the class was with the Gryffindors. Draco and Orion had talked about Weasley in the few days following their meeting with him, but before Orion had received his letter from Lucius. Draco had been rather surprised at how much he had enjoyed sparring with Weasley over Quidditch, and Orion had enjoyed the conversation as well. But they had been raised to hate Weasleys, and all Gryffindors in general. So they approached the lesson with caution, uncertain how they would respond to whatever happened in class.

They arrived at the classroom and quickly moved to the front desk, then turned to watch the other students trickle in. Hermione Granger was the next to arrive, and noticing the brothers, along with Greg and Vince, had already claimed the front desks, she glared at them, and moved to the opposite end of the room. Blaise showed up next, chatting with Pansy, and they were followed by most of the Slytherin girls, and sat down right behind Draco and Orion. Next came a group of Gryffindors, who took one glance at the Slytherin group that had already formed, and walked over to sit near Granger. Weasley came in shortly afterwards, followed by Neville. He glanced at Draco and Orion, then over at the Gryffindors who were eyeing the Slytherins suspiciously, whispered something to Neville, then walked to Draco and Orion's table.

Unfortunately, just as he opened his mouth to speak, Snape swept into the classroom. “You, there. Find a seat. That’s 2 points for not being seated at the start of class.” He glared at Weasley until he had scurried over to sit with Neville, then glared around the class. “This,” he said, “will be one of the most difficult classes you take during your time here at Hogwarts. I expect that few of you will excel in it, as it is a very difficult subject to master. However…That *does not* mean I am willing to accept anything less than your best in this class. Is that understood?”

The students nodded, and there were several mumbled “Yes, sirs” throughout the classroom.

Snape took the roll quickly, then began to quiz the class on potions ingredients. By the end of the class, Orion and Draco had raked up more than twenty points each for their house, and Gryffindor had gotten only five total. It had been the best class they’d had so far.

/8\

Confrontations

As the boys left their first potions class, they were in quite high spirits. At least until they heard Weasley talking with his housemates. “That Snape. What a creep. He wouldn’t know a good student if they came up and kissed his arse.”

Draco stepped forward before Orion could stop him. “Watch yourself, Weasley. I wouldn’t talk that way about our professor if I were you.”

Ron turned, and Orion could see his ears had gone red. “Yeah, well, I noticed you and your brother got plenty of his attention. Teacher’s pet already, Malfoy?”

Orion’s voice was quiet, but it carried easily in the hall. “Watch your mouth, Weasley.”

Draco turned to his brother. “Don’t waste your breath, Orion. Weasleys aren’t taught manners like civilized people are…” And with that, Weasley jumped forward, tackling Draco around the chest. With that, both boys were on the floor, punching as hard as they could.

Orion watched this scene unfold with horror. He looked over at the Gryffindors, who had all pulled back when the Slytherins approached. Longbottom stood at the front of the crowd, wringing his hands as he watched the fight. Orion recalled the wonderful conversation he and Draco had had with the two Gryffindors less than a week ago, and quickly reached a decision. He turned to Vince and Greg, who still stood beside him, though the rest of the Slytherins had pulled back away from the fight. “Damn it, pull them apart!” When the boys hesitated, he got angry. “Now! Before a teacher shows and we all get detention!” They hurried to where the two rolled about on the floor and pulled them apart.

Draco’s lip was split, and his eye was already swelling, but still he struggled to get at the other boy. “Draco, do you want to get a detention our first week of school? Especially a week when father is coming to visit?” Then Orion turned to Weasley. “And you should

learn to control your temper, Weasley. Just ‘cause *you* don’t like a teacher doesn’t mean that no one should.” Weasley glared at him, but didn’t respond.

“Look, I thought maybe we were getting along a bit better after the time we spent talking on Monday. I guess not, hm? Just stay out of our way, and we’ll stay out of yours. All right?”

Weasley glared for a moment longer, then nodded. Vince let go at Orion’s nod, and Weasley moved off to the center of the Gryffindor crowd who stood off on one side of the hall, facing the Slytherins who had gathered together on the other side. The Gryffindors glared at the Slytherins for a moment, but when Weasley and Longbottom began to walk up the hall towards the great hall, they turned to follow, the Slytherins forgotten for the moment.

After lunch, the rest of the day went much faster, and soon it was time to find their way once more to the room the Headmaster had set aside for the boys to talk to the students from the other houses. Draco tried to convince Orion to bring Vince and Greg, but Orion refused. “The headmaster said not to. Do you really want him to go back on his word?” Neither boy was ready for this. Neither truly believed that Orion was truly Harry Potter, but that wouldn’t stop the Headmaster from telling people he was.

“We certainly haven’t made a friend yet. If your little fight didn’t prove that to you, it certainly did to me. It’s not going to kill us, Drake. We’ll be fine.” He turned away from Draco and led the way to their meeting room.

They only had to wait for a few moments before their visitors arrived. They introduced themselves as Ernie MacMillan and Hannah Abbott. They were Hufflepuffs. The boy was complete milquetoast. He simpered at them every time he talked, trying to gain favour, obviously. The girl was even shyer than Longbottom had been. It was all Orion and Draco could do to keep the conversation going the entire hour. When the Hufflepuffs had left, they both drew a great sigh of relief. There were two who would *never* be on their friends list, not if they could help it.

The next morning, they awoke in the best mood they'd had since they had arrived at the school. It was the weekend, and they had a whole morning to waste however they wanted. Sure, they had homework, but that could be dealt with on Sunday afternoon, once they'd enjoyed themselves a bit.

Draco, Orion, Vince and Greg, followed quickly by Pansy, Daphne and Tracy, all spilled out on the front lawn. The boys began their favorite game. Who could tell the best tall tale and get the most people to believe it. And, if something was guessed to be false that was true, even more points were awarded. Draco, of course, was best at this, though Orion followed closely behind. Vince actually had them going when he told them about how his mother had gotten pregnant that summer, but had spelled the child to another woman so she wouldn't have to carry it. Pansy was in tears of laughter over that one.

By lunchtime, they were all quite relaxed, and went inside to eat, but as they walked up the staircase to the main entrance, Orion and Draco's father appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Draco, Orion. I was just speaking with your headmaster. I thought the three of us could have lunch in Hogsmeade. That is, if you're interested, of course."

"That would be great! Can Vince and Greg come?" Draco asked.

Lucius shot the other two boys a look. "I'm afraid not. Perhaps another time."

Orion and Draco knew what that meant. He was brushing their friends off, but didn't want to be obvious about it. Lucius watched the rest of their little group as they hurried around him and into the hall, then turned back to his sons. "Well, boys, shall we go?"

The boys ran back down the stairs, and Lucius followed close behind. As they walked to Hogsmeade, Draco told their father about how their first week had gone, chattering on about their teachers, and especially how great Snape was. Orion, though, said nothing. He spent the entire trip to the little town examining the man he had always known as 'father.'

He wanted to be angry. He wanted to scream at the top of his lungs. But those weren't things a Malfoy did. But he wasn't exactly a Malfoy, now, was he? So, what did that make him?

Orion's musing continued in this way until they entered the Three Broomsticks. Lucius led the boys to a private room at the back of the place, and Madam Rosmerta brought them a plate of sandwiches, a large bowl of soup, and three tankards of butterbeer.

Orion picked at his lunch as he watched Lucius and Draco chat while they ate. Lucius asked what their favourite classes were, if they'd met any new friends, and whether or not they needed their own room. "I can arrange it for you, if necessary, Draco. I mean, what's the good of having a father who is a school governor if you get no perks?"

Draco grinned. "Nah, we're good, father. For now anyway. But I'm sure we'll keep it in mind, won't we, Orion?"

Orion tried to smile but his facial muscles just wouldn't cooperate.

Finally, after nearly an hour, he couldn't take it any more. A sneer appeared across his face as he growled, "Are we going to talk about this, or are we just going to continue to avoid it?"

Draco and Lucius both looked at him, startled. Orion had always been the quieter of the two boys. It was Draco who was prone to outbursts. Lucius recovered quickly, though. "Well, I thought we could behave like civilized people first, and then discuss things calmly and rationally." Lucius's eyes were narrowed, and both boys knew what that meant. He was displeased.

But for once, Orion didn't care. What did it matter what Lucius Malfoy thought? He wasn't his father. "Civilized people? You mean the kind of civilized people who help kill a couple, then abduct their son? That kind of civilized people?" He stood up, and his voice, first low, began to rise as he spoke, until he was near-shouting at Lucius.

Lucius stood and towered over him. "You cannot possibly understand what happened that night, boy. I *saved* you. Do you

honestly think you would have survived the night if I hadn't taken you with me? Do you think my former comrades would have let you live?"

Orion barked a laugh. "*Former* comrades? Since when are Greg and Vince's fathers no longer welcome in your home, Lucius? The day you disassociate yourself from the other Death Eaters is the day you fall down dead. And I'm beginning to think I might enjoy waiting for that day."

Lucius stepped forward, his cane in his fist. Both boys recognized that as a very threatening move, but while Orion held his ground, Draco was quick to move. Between them. "Stop it!" He glared at his father.

"Get out of the way, Draco. Your brother's far too ungrateful for the life I've given him …"

"And which brother is that, *father*? The one who you admit to having abducted, perhaps?" Draco's hand reached for his wand. "I won't let you hurt him. You've done enough already."

Then another growl came from behind Draco. "Get out of the way, Draco. He's right. This is between him and me. But he's wrong about one thing. He's had this coming. For ten years. And, as I am the Boy Who Lived, I'm probably the best one to give it to him." Draco looked at Orion, and was horrified to see him, wand out, an almost visible halo of energy crackling around him.

"Ori, no…"

"Draco, get out of the way."

"Ori, I can't let you do this."

"He helped kill my parents!"

"He's our father, Ori."

"He's not my father. My father's dead! I can't even wish that I wasn't his son." Orion met Lucius's cool blue gaze. "Because I'm not, am I, *Lucius*?"

Lucius looked down his nose at the boy. “No.” He broke the gaze, and laid his walking stick across the table. “No, you’re not. But I wish you were.”

The two boys gaped at him. They had never seen their father back down before in their lives.

“You were so obviously powerful. I wanted to make sure you had all the training someone with your power deserved. And you got it.” He looked back, meeting Orion’s eyes. “Are you truly so unhappy with your life?”

Orion had no answer for this. He looked away from Lucius, then took one look at Draco, then turned away entirely. Draco moved to his brother’s side. He tried to put his hand on Orion’s shoulder, but Orion shook him off. “We should get back to school. We have homework to attend to.”

Lucius nodded, picked up his cane, and placed several galleons on the table. “Come along, boys.” The walk back to the school was much quieter than the walk to Hogsmeade had been. The boys separated from Lucius at the steps and ran back to their dorm without another word to him.

Lucius sighed. He supposed he’d truly messed things up. But what was he supposed to have done? Told the boy from the beginning, but sworn him to secrecy? It would never have worked. Dumbledore would have found out far too soon. At least this way, Orion had a home with them, and eventually he would see that.

As Lucius turned to leave for home, however, Severus Snape appeared behind him. “Lucius. We need to talk.”

Lucius stiffened. “Do we, Severus? Whatever about?” he quirked an eyebrow at the man.

“Your son.”

“My son? Which one?”

“Orion.” The scowl on Severus’s face told him this was more than a simple request.

Lucius drew himself up and glowered at the Potions Master. “I see. And where will we be having this…talk?”

“My office, Lucius. And I refuse to take no for an answer. If I don’t get answers from you, I will get them from your sons, Lucius. So, which do you prefer?”

“I don’t seem to have been given a choice, do I?” he growled. He stepped towards Severus. “But just because I don’t want you to harm my sons. You do, Snape, and you’ll answer to me.” With that, he walked past the man and headed towards the dungeons, towards the room he knew Snape used as his office.

Snape followed closely behind, and once they were in his office, he locked and warded the door, so that no one could eavesdrop on them. Then he turned back to Lucius. Now that the man was here, he was uncertain how to begin. Perhaps it would be best to start with the hard questions. “What is wrong with Orion?”

Lucius smirked. “Wrong? Is there something wrong with my son, Snape? You should be careful, *old friend*. After all, if anything were to happen to either of my sons while they were under your care, you would be the one held accountable.”

Snape tried desperately to keep the growl from his voice, and tried again. “Your son collapsed on Wednesday, after receiving this,” he tossed the letter Orion had received from Lucius at him, “from *you*. What, exactly, is it that you told him that is the truth, Lucius? You’ve been hiding a secret about that boy for some time now. I always thought your relationship with the boy was a bit odd. If I find out that you’ve hurt the boy…or worse…”

Lucius laughed lightly, and tossed the letter on Snape’s desk. “Calm yourself. You’ll give yourself a coronary. I have never hit either of my sons, nor have I touched them in any…unsavoury way.”

Snape glared at him. “But?”

There was a cold glint in Lucius's eye, but nothing would make Snape back down now. This boy was in his charge. How was he supposed to guide the boy if he didn't know what was going on with him?

Snape watched as Lucius visibly steeled himself before speaking. This was definitely something he was not going to enjoy hearing. "Orion is not my son."

Snape did not know whether to laugh or call him a liar.

Lucius turned away from him. "I…took him from his parent's home the night they were killed. He's never known any home but ours. Narcissa doesn't even know. I charmed her memory so she would think the boys were twins. There are only four months between them. No one really questioned it."

Snape was horrified. "You took the boy during one of your Death Eater raids? Did you *want* to get caught? What if the Dark Lord had found out?"

Lucius laughed a mirthless laugh. "Do you truly think me a fool, Severus?" He looked at Snape, and Snape was horrified at just how cold the man's eyes could get. "Whose son do you think I would waste my life on? Come now," he purred, "why would Lucius Malfoy do such a completely ludicrous thing?"

Snape examined the man while he thought. Lucius was never a man to make a simple mistake. So why would he risk the Dark Lord's wrath? Unless…Snape had not been there the night the Potters had been killed, but many of the Death Eaters had. Had Lucius been there? Could he possibly have taken… "Harry Potter?" Snape whispered, horrified.

The self-deprecating smile Lucius wore horrified Snape almost as much as his discovery. "I see your brains haven't completely decayed since you left school. I trust you to keep this to yourself. Dumbledore has promised me that the boy will stay with us, as he is happy and healthy. That it will be the boy's choice to release his identity to the world at large. Can I count on you?"

“I will speak of it to no one but Dumbledore, the boys, or yourself.” He pulled himself straight. “But you can’t really expect this secret to stay secret for long, Lucius.”

“Perhaps not, Snape, but if I discover that the leak came from Slytherin house, you will be the first I will seek out and destroy.”

Snape narrowed his eyes. “You…actually care for the boy? But…he’s…a Potter.”

Lucius moved until his face was inches from Snape’s. “No, he’s a Malfoy, and has been since he was one year old, Snape. And don’t you forget it. If I hear any complaints from the boys about how you treat *my sons*, you will regret that, too.” With that, he walked to the door. “Good evening, Snape,” he tossed over his shoulder. Then the door was open and he was gone, leaving a horrified and confused Potions Master behind him.

/9\

Friends and Enemies

When Draco and Orion made it back to their room, Draco tried to talk to Orion, but Orion was having none of it.

“Ori, I know you’re angry…”

Orion spun to face him. “Angry? Are you kidding me, Draco? How would you feel if you’d been lied to your entire life? That your ‘father’ turned out to have killed *your* parents? Hm? Do you honestly think you could forgive him? No? Then don’t expect me to!”

“Ori, you know father didn’t…”

“I don’t know anything about what he would or wouldn’t do, Draco. We know he was there. Obviously, even if he wasn’t intimately involved in my parents’ deaths, he *could* have stopped it. He could have…if he’d *really* wanted to.”

“Ori…”

“No! He lied to you too, Draco, how can you defend him?” He couldn’t listen any more. He just needed to think, and Draco wasn’t going to allow that. “Just leave me alone. I need to think.” When Draco continued to stand there, obviously trying to figure out what to say to calm him down, Orion couldn’t stand it any more. He stormed from the room. He had no idea where to go, but he had to get out of there. He had to be alone.

He didn’t know where he was going until he realized suddenly that he was in the hall that led to the meeting-place Dumbledore had provided for him. He entered the room, and sat there alone for several minutes. How could anyone expect him to deal with this? How could Draco stick up for Lucius? Why had Lucius never told him? Did he think that Orion was too weak? Or was he just protecting himself?

He was so lost in his thoughts that he did not notice a ginger-haired boy enter, then stare at him, curiosity plain across his face. “Malfoy?”

Orion looked up to see the boy looking at him guardedly. “Weasley. What do you want?”

“I…” his face went red. “I just saw the open door, and wondered what was up. I didn’t mean to bother you.” His eyes flashed. “I’ll just leave you alone.” He turned to leave, but Orion realized he needed *someone* to talk to, even if he couldn’t tell him everything. Someone who wasn’t in the family, who didn’t have a stake in how he felt about things.

“Weasley…” The boy turned back to look at him.

“What?” He was obviously suspicious.

Orion looked at the other boy, hesitating. He bit his lip. “Talk with me?”

He was incredulous. “You…want to talk…to me?” The suspicion was back quickly. “Where’s your brother? Is this some kind of trick to get me in trouble so that I lose a bunch of house points?”

“No. I just need someone to talk to. And I can’t talk to Draco. He doesn’t understand.”

“I know what you mean. My brothers…well, let’s just say being the youngest brother’s never been fun.”

Orion smiled. “I bet. How many brothers do you have?”

“Five. And a younger sister, too.”

“Geez. I can’t imagine.”

Weasley sneered. “Yeah, well I can’t imagine being raised a Malfoy…”

Orion sighed. That had struck a nerve. “I didn’t mean it that way. I just meant…Well, me and Draco get into enough fights. I can’t imagine there being more of us. And at least we’re the same age…” But they weren’t the same age, were they? After all, the Boy Who Lived was born in August or something, wasn’t he?

Weasley ducked his head, but Orion could see the grin on his face. He walked to the couch across from Orion and said, “I can’t imagine. Fred and George are twins. They always spend all their time together. I always envied them…”

Orion smiled. “Yeah, well, they probably aren’t quite as close as you think. But they probably face everything together ‘cause it’s easier. Even when Draco and I are fighting, we always stick up for each other. It’s nice knowing that he’ll always defend me, no matter what…” But if they weren’t really brothers, would Draco keep doing that?

“Malfoy?”

Orion started. He’d almost forgotten he wasn’t alone. “Huh? Oh, sorry, Weasley.”

“It’s okay. You all right?”

“Not really.” He wished he could tell Weasley everything. But he just wasn’t ready. He didn’t even believe it himself, and if he told Weasley, the kid’d probably blab all over the place about it. “Look, would you mind, I mean…it seems strange to call you Weasley all the time. Could I call you by your first name? And you could call me Orion?”

Weasley smiled shyly. “Yeah, Mal…uh…Orion. I’d like that. But call me Ron, okay? I hate it when people call me ‘Ronald.’” His nose crinkled in distaste. “I feel like I’m at a funeral or something.”

“Right…Ron.”

The two talked about everything. About classes, favourite and least favourite. About Quidditch, and who they thought might win the Quidditch cup at Hogwarts this year. That led to talking about houses, and about heads of houses, which led to talking about Snape, which was much easier to talk about without Draco around to fly off the handle again. When Orion realized that it was almost time for dinner, he offered to walk down to the hall with Ron.

“You’d want to be seen with me? Your brother probably wouldn’t like that…”

Orion scowled. “Yeah, well, Draco doesn’t have to like everything I do.”

Ron grinned. “Cool.”

Before the boys left the room, Orion also invited him to come back on Monday. “I mean, I realize you and Draco don’t exactly get along, but…well, it helped, you know? Talking to you, I mean. Sometimes I need someone to talk to who isn’t going to tell me ‘That’s not the Malfoy Way!’ all the time, you know?”

Ron grinned. “Yeah, I think I do.”

Ron was right about Draco. When the two boys arrived outside the Great Hall, Draco, Greg and Vince were just coming up from the dungeons. When Draco saw who Orion was with, he scowled. “Weasley.”

Orion could feel Ron stiffen beside him. “Malfoy,” he said with a sneer.

Draco turned to Orion. “Where the hell have you been? I’ve had Greg and Vince here looking all over for you. And I find you with…” he sneered in Ron’s direction, “this?”

Orion could see Ron’s face growing red already. “Draco, I don’t have to report my whereabouts to you every second of the day, you know. And if I want to talk to Ron, I can. There’s not a thing you can do to stop me.”

Draco’s eyes flashed dangerously. “Father…”

“*Father* has no say in it either!” With that, he pulled Ron behind him, and they entered the hall.

Orion made sure to sit between Theo and Blaise after he separated from Ron, so that Draco couldn’t hiss in his ear the entire night. He’d probably have to avoid him in the common room, too. Draco, Vince

and Greg sat across from them, and Orion could feel Draco watching him through the entire meal.

When they returned to the common room that night, Draco was quick to attack. "What the hell do you think you're doing? Do you *want* to piss off father?"

"Why should I care *what* he thinks, Draco? He obviously doesn't care what *I* think."

"That's not true! Didn't you see how upset he was today? Didn't you see how your accusations hurt him? Damn it, Ori, he loves you. And you acted like he's been keeping you locked in the basement or something!"

Orion no longer cared about discretion. He was too angry. "What do you care, Draco? Your life is the same it always was. Mine's the one that's been turned on its head!"

"Ori, nothing's changed…"

"*Everything's* changed, Draco! I don't even know who I am anymore!"

"Calm down!"

"No! I want to scream! I'm sick of being calm. I hate this! I hate him!"

And then a calm, silky voice came from behind him. "And who is it, exactly, that you hate, Mr. Malfoy?"

The boys turned, and saw Snape standing in the doorway of the common room, a dark scowl on his face. Orion also began to notice that the entire house was staring at the two of them, as though they were street performers, and they didn't want to miss the next act.

"Um…No one, sir."

Snape strode across the room to where the boys stood. "No one? It didn't sound like that from what I heard while I was in the *hall*, Mr. Malfoy." He sneered down at Orion. "Perhaps you should be

more…circumspect in your arguments next time? Tone them down a touch, perhaps? I wouldn't want to have to write to your…*father*…now, would I?"

Orion's heart sped up. Did he know? He swallowed. "No, sir."

"Good. I suggest, if you wish to continue this little…ah…discussion…you do so in your room. Got it?"

"Yes, sir," the boys chorused.

Without another word, Snape shot a glance around the room. As he did so, people seemed to unfreeze from where they were standing, and return to whatever they had been doing before the boys' fight had distracted them. Then Snape strode from the room, his robes fluttering behind him.

Orion began to see exactly why Ron didn't like Snape… He hurried to his room, but Draco followed close behind.

"Ori, we need to talk about this…"

Orion turned to look at his brother. "No. We don't. I'm angry at him. It's that simple. If you want to defend him to yourself, that's fine. But I can't do that anymore. I need to find another way to deal with this. Because he lied, Draco. And that's not something I can just ignore."

Draco looked away for a moment, and Orion knew he was trying to keep his composure. When he looked back, Orion could see tears glittering at the corners of his eyes. "I…just don't want to lose you, Ori. You're my brother."

Orion smiled sadly, and put his arm around his brother's shoulders. "I promise, no matter what, Draco, I always will be."

Draco clung to him for a moment, then smiled. "Thanks. I…I promise I won't mention it again until you want to talk about it, okay?"

"Thank you, Draco. I think I'm going to bed now. It's been a long day."

“Okay. I’ll try to keep the others from waking you when they come in. You know Vince and Greg. They always sound like a heard of elephants…” The boys laughed at this, then Draco turned and left the room. Orion got undressed, put on his favourite set of pyjamas, and slipped under the covers. But it was a long time before he fell asleep.

/10\

Friends and Family

Sunday dragged. There was tons of homework to be done, but the events of the previous day still haunted Orion, and it made it very hard to concentrate. What made it worse was the fact that he could feel Draco glance up at him every now and then. He knew that Draco wanted to discuss what had happened, but Orion felt like he would scream if he heard his brother utter the word “father” once more. He just needed time.

And he knew that Draco was trying hard to give it to him. But Draco was the one who usually needed space. Orion knew that Draco had no idea how to treat him now that the shoe was on the other foot.

But now Orion was the one who wanted to throw things, hit people…And Draco was worried, but Orion couldn’t bother with that right now. Maybe this new part of him was the real Harry trying to come out? Perhaps what Lucius had told them about “that Potter boy” was true, and he was as dangerous as they had been told. Should he make a break with Draco now, so that he wouldn’t accidentally hurt him later?

He struggled with his thoughts and his homework all day, gratified for the breaks provided by mealtimes, which Vince and Greg refused to miss. By dinner, his thoughts hadn’t really been resolved, but somehow, knowing he could go a whole day without fighting with Draco helped. After finishing his last piece of homework, he, Draco, Vince and Greg celebrated by sneaking into the kitchens via a route that had been shown to Draco by one of the older boys when they had had their party for Vince the first day of classes, and retrieving a late-night snack. Returning to their dorm, the four boys proceeded to party quite late into the night, until Blaise began to shout and throw shoes at them to get them to go to bed.

When classes resumed the next day, things seemed almost normal. And even going to their “meeting” that night was tempered with the fact that Orion was willing to let Vince and Greg tag along, now that he knew Ron would be coming. Of course, Draco didn’t know that yet, but Orion could deal with him. If necessary.

The four boys walked to the room together, and Orion was pleased to see Ron waiting at the door. “Hi, Ron. How are things?” he greeted him cheerfully.

Ron grinned uncertainly and looked behind Orion at the other three boys. “Um, good, Orion. You?”

“Great.” Ron raised an eyebrow and looked at the other boys, who were still hanging back. Orion grinned. “Well, better than yesterday, anyway,” he laughed. Orion opened the door and stood back to let the others enter. Draco waved Vince and Greg after Ron, then pushed the door closed before Orion could enter.

“What do you think you’re doing, Ori? Why’d you invite that…”

Orion crossed his arms and glared at Draco. “Careful about the next word you say, Draco,” he growled in a near-perfect imitation of Lucius.

“If you want to be friends with that…boy…why do I have do deal with him, too?”

“You’re the one who wanted Vince and Greg to come tonight. Changed your mind?”

Draco glared at Orion. “No, but that doesn’t mean…”

“Later, Draco. We can discuss this when we aren’t expecting guests. After all, the Ravenclaws are supposed to be coming tonight, remember?” With that, he opened the door, leaving it ajar for Draco and their visitors. He was pleased to see that though Vince and Greg were both cracking their knuckles, they were standing on the opposite side of the room from Ron.

Orion sat in the middle of the room. He looked pointedly at Ron, who quickly scurried and sat next to him. “Why’d you bring…them?” he whispered to his new friend.

Orion looked coldly at his new friend. “They’re my friends. We’ve spent most of our childhood together. I didn’t want to just leave them out.”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you, but really…They’re rather scary,” Ron swallowed.

Orion had to work to hide the smile. “Yeah, I guess they are.”

Draco finally entered the room when the two Ravenclaws came. This time, two girls arrived. One dark haired, and the other blonde. Draco hurried and pointedly sat down on the other side of Orion, glaring in Ron’s direction the entire time. The girls introduced themselves as Padma Patil and Mandy Brocklehurst. The two girls were quite chatty, keeping up most of the conversation themselves, and excused themselves as soon as the hour was up. They were nice enough, but by the time they were gone, the five boys were not sorry to see them go.

“Geez,” Ron said once they were gone. “I never thought they’d shut up. Are all girls like that?”

“Oh, only when you’re around, Weasley,” Draco drawled. He stood up and looked expectantly down at Orion. “Shall we?”

Orion scowled at him. “There’s no rush, Draco. We don’t have to be back to the common room for another hour. I thought we could all talk Quidditch or something for a while.”

“With him?” Draco drawled. “He has no taste, and his favourite team couldn’t fly its way out of a box.”

“Draco…”

Ron flushed and stood up. “Whatever. Orion, I’ll see you around, okay? I don’t think your brother wants me around.”

Now Orion stood too. “Ron, no. If he wants to leave, let him. You don’t have to go.”

Draco smirked. “Let the weasel go, Orion. If he wants to run away with his tail between his legs, that’s fine with me.”

There was a blur of movement, and Draco was on the floor holding his chin before Orion could hold Ron back. “Ron, no!”

But it was too late. Orion knew that it was probably only a matter of time before Dumbledore arrived and gave them all detention. “Look, just…go over there. I need to check him.” Ron glared, but retreated back to the couch, and Orion knelt down to check on Draco. “Can you talk?”

Draco’s silver eyes glared up at him. “A bit.” The words were muffled, but more from the fact that Draco was clenching his teeth.

Orion stood up and helped Draco to stand. “You can’t say you didn’t ask for it, Draco.”

“Just watch me.” He made a move towards Ron, but Orion restrained him.

“Damn it, Draco. We’re already in trouble. You know that Dumbledore probably watches these meetings.”

“So?” Draco spat.

“So, Snape is probably on his way right now, if not Dumbledore himself. Do you honestly want to be fighting with Ron when he gets here?”

“No, I want him out of my life!” He glared at Orion. “How can you put up with the smarmy little prat, Ori?”

Orion’s lips narrowed. “At least he doesn’t tell me who to hang out with, Draco. Or how I should feel. Go sit with Vince and Greg. I need to calm him down.” Orion turned away from him and walked across the room where Ron stood, looking away from the two brothers. “Ron?” He was worried. He’d never had his own friends before. Lucius had chosen every boy he and Draco had ever hung out with. He didn’t know how to keep from losing Ron’s friendship. “I’m sorry about that. Draco’s just a bit…protective.”

Ron grimaced. “I know how that can be. But I think from now on, I’ll duck out on these little meetings of yours. Maybe you and I can visit during the weekends or something.”

“Look, Ron, don’t let Draco chase you away…”

“I’m not. Discretion, and all that, don’t you know.”

“At least come with the Gryffindors on Friday?”

Ron smiled. “I’ll think about it, okay?”

“Thanks,” Orion smiled. He glanced across the room, and watched Draco glare at him and Ron, then sighed.

When no teachers had shown after several more minutes, Orion told Ron to go. Then he, Draco, Vince and Greg walked slowly back to the Slytherin common room, Orion in the lead. After Draco’s reactions of the last few days, Orion wasn’t ready to listen to any excuses, and quickly headed to their dorm to avoid whatever he had to say. He quickly undressed and got into bed. Whatever Draco wanted to say, it could wait for morning, when Orion would be far less likely to hit him.

The next morning, Orion hurried through his morning routine before the other boys even woke, and went alone to the Great Hall alone to have breakfast. He was still eating when Draco and the others arrived. Before Draco could speak, however, Orion stood, glanced once at him, then walked away.

He spent the rest of the time before classes back in the common room, and when he went to his first class, he was quick to sit with one of the Ravenclaws who the Slytherins shared their first class with. Draco scowled when he came in, then sat directly in front of Orion. With the door in this classroom at the front of the class, he knew there was no way he’d be able to escape past Draco once class was over.

When the class was over, Orion slowly packed his bag and waited for the rest of his classmates to leave, then watched as Draco, with Vince and Greg behind him, approached. “Need something?”

“You’ve been avoiding me, Ori.”

“Gee, I wonder why I’d do that…Let’s see, could it be because you’ve been refusing to listen to me lately? I’m sick of it, Draco. I don’t want to hear it any more. If all you’re going to do is second guess me and

yell at me about every choice I make, then I really don't want to talk to you. You're my brother, but that doesn't mean that I have to listen to this again and again. Just leave me alone."

"Look, Ori, I realize all this has you upset, but you can't just discard everything you know just 'cause you're mad at father." He tried to reach out to Orion, but Orion batted his hand away.

"So you're just allowed to ambush me? Make me talk? Tell me how to feel? You can't control me, Draco. Neither can Lucius. And I need to understand all this. And accept it." Orion swung his bag on his shoulder. "Look, if you want things to be the way they were, I'm sorry, but I can't be that way any more. So you have two choices: help me get through this, and accept my choices; or leave me alone until I've figured things out." He pushed past Draco. "We need to hurry if we're going to get to our next class in time."

The rest of the day passed quietly, with Draco sitting beside him again in each of their classes, and saying very little. When they sat down to do some homework that night, Orion felt Draco watching him once more. "Yes, Draco?"

There was no response, only silence, and finally Orion looked up from the book he was reading to see Draco biting his lip. "What?" It was surprising seeing Draco at a loss for words.

"I…Ori, I hate you being mad at me. I just want to be there for you."

Orion sighed. "I'm not mad at you, Draco. I just need space, and you constantly keep trying to tell me how to deal with this. I want to be friends with Ron, Draco. He's nice. We had a great conversation that first day, remember? And Saturday he helped me calm down."

"But…why can't I do that?"

Orion closed his eyes. "It's not that you can't, Draco, but you're too close to what's going on. You want me to feel a certain way, and I just can't bend that way right now. I need to find out what my own feelings are." He reached out and grabbed his brother's hand. "Draco, I don't want you to go away, it's just…sometimes I

need to think things through. And if I decide I want to see things a new way, I can't share it with you, because you'll fly off the handle."

"What if I promised not to?"

"You can't Draco. You're too close. No matter what you promise, you know it's going to be hard for you to follow through. I like being with you, being your brother. But we don't have to be joined at the hip, Draco."

"What if I promised that I'd try really hard to get along with Weasley?"

"Could you do it?"

Draco looked down for a moment, then met Orion's eyes once more. "I…think so. He mentioned something about chess the other night. Maybe I'll bring my board on Friday," he smiled slightly, and Orion couldn't help but smile back.

"I'd like that. Thank you, Draco. This really means a lot to me."

"You're my brother, Ori. I'll do anything for you."

To my reviewers –

Hermionegreen – I'm trying to handle things slowly, so I'm really glad it's working. Hope you liked the latest between Ron, Orion & Draco.

Kateri1 – Oh, he'll recover. He won't be happy, but he'll recover.

MarsMoonStar – Glad you like it.

Nicoletta – Almost? I don't think I'm doing my job... Well, I'll rectify that soon enough. :D

PingPong5 – Sorry this chapter took so long. Holidays, you know. But I hope it was worth the wait. Hope you had a lovely holiday. As for Lucius, I have to agree with you there. I'm not a huge Lucius fan either. But he seems almost likeable in this. I think it's Harry's influence. :D

Jedi Buttercup – I'm glad their reactions all seem right. I'm trying very hard to keep close to the same characters, despite the fact that it's an AU.

Spiffycool – I don't think that Draco's happy about it, but I agree with you. All those AU fics where Harry and Ron hate each other never work for me. It always seems off. And as for Lucius, I want to make sure that Orion keeps everything he's done in mind. He'll forgive him, but it'll take a while. And Draco's going to have to deal with it.

Daroga's Rainy Daae – Well, I won't say for sure, but let's just say there will be a lot less fighting between the three of them.

Mirie – Glad you like it. I'm really enjoying these characters, and they're coming out surprisingly well. I usually have one character or another that I can't get to sound right, so I'm glad they all seem like the real thing. :)

Azntgr01 – Glad you like it.

I should have another chapter up within a week or two at the tops.

/11\ The “M” Word

The rest of the week went surprisingly quickly, and their first flying lesson on Thursday turned out to be with the Gryffindors, so after the lesson Ron took the time to introduce Orion to his other housemates. Dean and Seamus were both quiet, but pleasant, though Seamus seemed quite cautious about shaking his hand. Draco, Vince and Greg hung back, waiting for Orion to be finished, which obviously made the Gryffindors nervous, so they said their good-byes and hurried off to lunch.

Orion and Draco were both looking forward to their next Potions lesson. They were supposed to start actual potions this week, and they couldn’t wait to see what Professor Snape had in store. And at first it seemed much the same as their first class, with Snape striding in and proceeding to lecture them, however, Orion soon noticed that though he still called frequently on Draco to answer his questions, he repeatedly ignored Orion’s own raised hand.

It got worse when Orion went to the potions ingredients storage and got caught up talking to Ron. Snape growled at them to “Stop blocking the way, and let the other students get to the ingredients, Mr. Weasley, Mr…Malfoy. Twenty points each, I think.” Orion felt his face flame, and returned to his desk where he handed off the ingredients to Draco to prepare. How could he do that? Orion had thought that Snape *favored* the Slytherins. Apparently not.

He watched Snape wander among the desks as he scowled down at the Gryffindors, taking five points here for an incorrectly prepared ingredient, and ten there for an overflowing cauldron. However, once he approached the Slytherins, his attitude changed. Despite glaring problems with Greg and Vince’s potion, which they were no longer able to stir as it had reached the consistency of cement, he simply nodded and moved on. Pansy’s potion, which had turned bright pink when it should have been aquamarine, was likewise ignored. And then he reached the brothers’ table and looked down into the cauldron Orion was stirring. And smirked.

“Interesting colour, Mr. Malfoy. I believe that has been over stirred. I think that will be another ten points.” And he walked away once more.

Draco looked over at Orion in horror, then down into their cauldron. "I don't think it looks that bad…" he said quietly.

Orion was dumbstruck. Thirty points in one class? Father'd kill him! As they wandered out of class, Ron hurried over to him. "Wow. I thought I'd never see the day. Fred and George told me Snape *always* favours the Slytherins. What'd you do? Put ground glass in his tea or something?"

Orion looked at him, dazed. "Uh…no. I can't think of anything I've done." He turned to look at Draco, who was at the front of the classroom, now, obviously arguing with the Potion's Master. Orion could tell that Snape was not pleased with Draco's reaction.

"Mr. Malfoy, unless you want to serve a detention tonight, I suggest you stop questioning me on this matter, *right now*. *I* am the teacher here, and if I say the potion was ruined, I believe that it is *my* opinion that counts. Now go!"

Draco turned and stormed over to where his brother stood. "I'm beginning to agree with you, Weasley. How dare he? Father'll…"

"Father won't do anything, Draco. He'll just tell me that I'd better work harder." Orion sighed. "I wish I knew what I'd done."

Ron looked concerned. "Maybe…Well, it might have been 'cause you were talking to me…"

"No, I don't think so, Ron." Orion wasn't sure, but he wondered. It seemed as though Snape knew who he really was. Maybe he, like the Malfoys, only saw Harry Potter as the brat who 'caused the downfall of the Dark Lord? "Come on, let's go back to the common room," he said to Draco. "See you tonight, Ron?"

Ron shot a look at Draco. "Uh, yeah."

Draco smirked at his brother's new friend. "Oh, and Weasley?" Ron looked at him, startled. "Better polish up on your chess skills. Time to put your money where your mouth is," he grinned at the boy.

To Orion's surprise, Ron grinned back. "You're on, Malfoy. I can't loose."

Draco sneered at the other boy. "We'll see about that, Weasley. Come on, Ori." Then he turned on his heel and headed towards their common room. Orion hurried to catch up to him.

When they were walking side by side, Orion couldn't hold back any longer. "Why did you do that, Drake? Now Snape's going to be pissed at both of us."

Draco snorted. "I'm sure father will have something to say about that. He knows we're good at potions, Ori. What on earth do you think set him off?"

Orion had his suspicions, but he didn't want to piss Draco off more, and it might set him off against Ron again… "No idea. Maybe he was just in a bad mood today?"

"Bad mood? He gave Greg and Vince full marks! And their potion was green!"

Orion shrugged. "Dunno then. Let's worry about it later. I want to get some homework done before dinner, since we're not going to have much time after."

The two boys, still followed by Greg and Vince, hurried to their rooms, dropped off their bags, and proceeded to go over the week's transfiguration homework. By dinnertime, they'd finished studying floating charms as well, and proceeded up to the Great Hall together in high spirits.

Orion was looking forward to chatting with Ron again. And who knows, maybe one of the new Gryffindors he'd meet that night might be interesting to get to know, too. He was especially pleased that Draco seemed to be looking forward to it as well. At least, he was looking forward to beating Ron at chess. Orion grinned. Draco never lost at chess. Ron would find himself hard-pressed to win tonight. And either Draco would win, which would please him no end, or he'd lose…and find a new chess partner in the boy.

No matter how many times Orion and Draco played together, Orion always lost. He just didn't seem to have a head for this sort of thing. But if Draco actually enjoyed playing chess with Ron…Orion couldn't keep the grin to himself. He knew his brother. Draco wouldn't give up a good chess partner easily. And that would mean a lot less complaints about hanging around with Ron.

After dinner, they worked on their History of Magic essay until it was time to go up to their meeting place. When they arrived, they found not only Ron there, but two others. Ron introduced them as Hermione Granger and Dean Thomas. Orion hadn't figured on this. How could Dumbledore send one of those…Mu…Muggle-born…people! He remembered that girl from the train. Not only was she a Mu…ggle-born, but she was a know-it-all as well. "What are *you* doing here, Granger?" he drawled.

The girl blushed angrily. "Dumbledore asked me to come."

Draco chimed in. "Yeah, mudblood? Well, you can leave, right now!"

And then Ron was between them, in their faces. "You take that back, Malfoy!"

Orion looked at Draco, who looked ready to pull out his wand, and realized that another fight was about to break out. "Draco, stop it. Apologize. We don't have to like her, but that's no reason to call her…that."

Draco shot an angry look at his brother. "You're going to let her stay? What about…"

Orion spoke through gritted teeth. "Dumbledore sent her, so we have to at least be civil." He took a deep breath. "It's only an hour, Draco. It won't kill us."

"Fine. But after this, we talk to Dumbledore about who comes to these things. I refuse to associate with—that—kind of person." He turned to Granger. "Sorry, Granger," he drawled, then swept past her and into the room, ignoring the other two Gryffindors entirely.

Orion sighed, then waved Greg and Vince to follow him. Then he turned to the Gryffindors. "I'm sorry. Draco and I, we…" what? Don't like Muggleborn? Were raised to hate you, Granger? How could he possibly apologize for something that had been part of him since he was small? "Look…"

Granger sniffed. "I don't like you, and you don't like me. That's fine. I'm only here because Dumbledore asked me to come. I won't bother a second time." And with that, she stormed into the room and sat as far from Draco as she could.

Orion turned to Ron, now, worried that perhaps he'd lost his new friend. Ron was looking at him warily again. "Look, Ron…"

"No, you look, M…" he sighed, "Orion…I like talking to you, and sometimes I forget be'cause of that, that you're a Malfoy. But if he says that word in front of me again, I won't hold back."

"I'm amazed you did tonight. Thanks."

Ron nearly smiled, then turned back to Dean, who had stood beside him through the entire exchange. "Look, you should know, Dean here's a Muggle-born, too." He looked carefully at Orion, gauging his reaction.

After a moment, Orion stuck out his hand. "Thomas." The dark-skinned boy's hand was warm in his own. "Good to meet you. Don't let Draco frighten you away, he's all bark, no bite," he winked.

Dean grinned at him. "Nice to know."

Ron grinned now, too. "Yeah, just don't get in his way when he does bark. 'Cause he may not bite, but those two gorillas of his really pack a punch."

Orion grinned as he led them into the room. "Yeah, they do."

The three boys settled down across from Draco, Vince and Greg. For several minutes, the conversation was quite stilted. They talked about the weather, and Quidditch, which Dean said he was quite looking forward to watching for the first time. Draco frowned at this,

but Orion was determined to keep the peace, so he got Ron talking about the Cannons again, which quickly distracted Draco.

Then Dean got to talking about going to Diagon Alley for the first time. Orion was startled at the grin that crossed his face when he listened to the boy's wonder at some of the things he had seen there. He and Draco had truly been just as excited, but for them, the true wonder of the alley was getting new things. He'd never really thought about what it would be like to go there for the first time, not even knowing magic existed before. Granger, too, began to chime in on this, and soon the boys were rolling their eyes as she quoted facts and statistics about the alley that none of them had ever had the wish to know.

Just as Orion was about to interrupt her, to prevent Draco from throttling the girl, Dean jumped back into the conversation. "You know, I was there the day of the break-in."

"Break-in?" Orion asked.

Hermione perked up. "You haven't heard about the Gringott's break-in? It's been in the paper every day! They're still trying to figure out how the person could even get in there, let alone escape."

Draco was floored. "Someone broke into Gringott's? That's impossible, Granger."

"No, it's not," she said excitedly. "The goblins found the body of one of their vault-keepers unconscious, and when they went into the vaults, they found that a particular vault had been tampered with. But the papers said the vault had just been emptied."

"I wonder what was in there," Ron said.

"I wonder who'd be stupid enough to try to break into Gringott's. Imagine if you'd run into one of the dragons down there!" Orion said.

"Dragons?" Dean asked, obviously alarmed.

Granger snorted. “The dragons are just rumors. I don’t think they exist. After all, dragons aren’t allowed in England. And how would they live, being underground all the time? I think the goblins spread that rumor to scare people out of trying to rob the vaults.”

“That’s what you think, Granger. Ori and I saw one once, didn’t we Ori? When father took us down to the vaults when we were younger.”

“Well, we saw something. I don’t know if it was a dragon or not, though.”

Draco glared at his brother. “Some help you are.”

“Draco, all we saw was a shadow and a flash of orange light! That could have been anything.”

“Well, *I* know it was a dragon.”

Orion grinned. This was an old argument. Draco loved dragons. For years he’d tried to bully their father into getting them a dragon for a pet. “If you say so, Drake.”

From this, their talk evolved into the dragon laws, which Draco assured Dean that the laws were completely unjust, and that every boy should have his own pet dragon to ride. The other boy paled slightly. “I think I’ll keep my feet on the ground, thanks.”

“Well, there’s no accounting for taste, is there?” Draco turned away from him and snickered.

“Shut it, Draco. Those things are a menace, and you know it. England wouldn’t have any trees left if people were allowed to own dragons. They’d have burned down all the forests.” Orion glared at his brother, then turned to Dean. “Just ignore him.”

Dean looked at the floor, and nodded, a slight smile on his face.

Soon, the hour was up, and Granger was the first to make her good-byes and hurry from the room. Dean stayed a few moments longer,

shaking Orion's hand and looking warily at Draco, Vince and Greg before leaving.

Ron sighed as he watched his housemates disappear. "Man, I'm glad that's over. That girl is so annoying! Can you imagine what it's like sharing a common room with her?" He looked at the two brothers. "The twit never shuts up!"

One of Draco's slender silver eyebrows raised. "Weasley, you have my sympathy on that," he grinned at him. "You might not be so bad after all."

MarsMoonStar – Glad you like it.

HermioneGreen – Well, the chess match will be in the next chapter. I think that'll be the real test.

Kateri1 – thank you.

Jedi Buttercup – I'm hoping that the differences of being brought up Malfoy will help a lot. But there are several events that I'm uncertain still, as to how I will handle them. Glad you like it.

Nicoletta – Actually, I think he agreed only to keep a hold on his brother but we'll see...

PingPong5 – Glad you like the chapter. I couldn't see Ron and Draco ever simply getting along. And I think there will always be a bit of rivalry there. As you can see from this chapter, the Philosopher's Stone is still out there for the boys to find. But first I have to get them to figure it out. I had a great Holiday. Even got several HP-themed gifts! :D

Azntgr01 – glad you like it.

SiverKnight7 – Well, you'll have to tell me what you think, but I think the next chapter should tell us more. :)

Bob – Orion when this story starts out is exactly like Draco in first year. He and Draco have been brought up to be good little Dark Wizards. But Harry is an unusual boy. Internally, he's still got a lot of

the Gryffindor characteristics that make him a Gryffindor in the books. So, while he believes in Lucius Malfoy's way of thinking, he's more open to new ideas and experiences than Draco. And since Dumbledore is forcing them on him, he has to find a way to accept them, or shatter. He's not really being given a choice, so he's choosing to find a way to make it bearable. That means that he's got to realize exactly what it is that Lucius has done to him. I do see Lucius as a father who cares about his sons, I just think he has a twisted view of what that kind of love means.

AmethystPhoenix – I'm really glad you like it. I'm trying hard to stay close to how I see the characters in the actual books. I can't wait to see what you have to say about Snape's reaction in this chapter. By "Go with the Gryffindors," I meant that Orion knew that the next two students to come would be Gryffindors. Hope that explains things.

Spiffycool – Well, even in this fic, Orion's got to grow up faster, and he's spending a lot of time in his own head with this, so he at least has some idea of what he wants to tell his brother. Glad you're enjoying it.

/12\ The Chess Match

“So, Weasley, ready to lose miserably?” Draco smirked as he pulled out his chess set.

Ron grinned. “Prepare eat those words, Malfoy.”

The two boys began to set up the chessboard, with Orion sitting beside Ron on one side of the table, and Greg and Vince on the other side, on either side of Draco. Draco took the black pieces. Orion knew this was not him being nice, but rather because he believed that if you couldn’t win playing black, you didn’t deserve to call yourself a chess master. Orion watched Ron set up his pieces on the board, and was concerned when he saw his friend’s hand tremble as he placed the pieces. At first Orion thought that perhaps Ron was actually worried about playing Draco, but this seemed unlikely when he noticed Ron caressing one of the pieces.

“These are…exquisite…Malfoy. Birthday present?”

Draco smirked. “No. Bought them for myself several years ago. They just…called to me.”

Orion could understand Ron’s fascination with the pieces. The white pieces were of a pale, pink-veined marble, and the black of pure onyx. Each piece had obviously been hand-carved. The king and queen had delicate features, and dragons on their clothes. The Rooks were Towers hugged tightly in the coils of long, serpent-like dragons, the Knights rode on the backs of great winged dragons, and the Bishops where little more than tall, slender dragons standing on their tails. The pawns were small dragons, apparently caught in flight. The eyes of the black pieces were small garnets, and the white pieces had emeralds for eyes. Lucius had complained about the board and its Muggle origins when Draco had bought it, but Draco had insisted. It was one of his most treasured possessions.

“How do you keep it in such good condition, Malfoy? My pieces are all beat up.”

Draco snorted. “It’s a Muggle set, Weasley. I would never let anyone hurt these pieces in *any* way.”

“Muggle? You own something that’s Muggle-made, Malfoy?” Ron looked surprised.

“So? It’s beautiful, it has dragons, and it’s expensive.” Draco’s chin rose with each word, and Orion knew this was a bad sign.

“I just thought it was interesting, was all, Malfoy. No insult intended…” Ron muttered.

“Come on, guys. We can’t be here all night,” he prompted, trying to defuse the situation.

Ron blinked at him, then nodded. “Right. Okay, Malfoy. Prepare to face defeat!” he grinned.

Draco smirked, then crossed his arms and leaned back. “You’re white, Weasley. I do believe it’s your move.”

The first few moves went by quickly, with Ron relying heavily on his knight, and Draco his queen, until Ron made the first capture. “Lucky move, Weasley,” Draco drawled.

“Oh, Malfoy? Prove it,” Ron grinned.

Play continued for several more minutes before Draco was able to even the score, but Ron quickly unbalanced the board once more by taking one of Draco’s bishops. Draco growled and leaned forward over the board. This time he didn’t relax until he’d managed to capture three of Ron’s pieces.

“Recover from that, Weasley,” Draco leaned back again, a perfect Malfoy smirk on his face.

Ron snorted. “That was nothing, Malfoy. Wait till I get started.”

After that, the gloves were off. Each was quick to proclaim every new capture, but was quick to dismiss any of their own captured pieces. Orion couldn’t help but enjoy watching. Both boys were obviously quite talented players, and watching the make their moves was almost like watching an intricate dance. Each of them was so intent on the moves the other was making it was almost as though

Orion, Vince and Greg weren't even in the room. And the truly enjoyable thing was that while they continued to insult each other throughout their moves, the insults became much less personal, and much more playful. Perhaps, Orion thought to himself, they might actually come out of this friendly, if not friends.

Soon, each boy had only a handful of pieces left. When Ron was first to call "Check," Orion held his breath. Would Ron actually win? And how would Draco take it?

And then it was over. Ron moved his bishop. "Checkmate, Malfoy. I win."

Draco looked at him in horror. "You…you must have cheated. I never lose! How…" It was true. The only times Draco lost anymore was when he played father or Snape. And even then, it was always close.

"Face it, Malfoy. I'm just a better player," Ron smirked at him.

"No. I demand a rematch. I'm sure you wouldn't be able to do it again. It must have been luck."

Ron simply smiled. "If you insist, Malfoy. I doubt it'll come out better for you, though." And it didn't. Draco had been so shaken by losing the first time that the second game took only half as long. And was quick to demand a third match. "One more, Weasley. I think I know what you're doing, now," his eyes intent as he began to place the black pieces in their starting positions.

"If you say so, Malfoy…" Ron began to reset his side of the board.

They played much more slowly this time. Each move was carefully thought out, and it took nearly an hour for the first capture. Unfortunately, as they approached endgame, the door slammed open and Snape strode in, his face a thundercloud. He spoke with barely a whisper, but to the boys, it was as though he shouted. "Gentlemen. May I ask what you are doing here at this time of night?"

All five boys looked up at him in horror. Orion couldn't believe he'd let himself forget about the time. "Sir! I'm sorry. We got caught up in watching Ron and Draco play, and the time just kind of…disappeared."

"I see." Snape strode to the board and examined the pieces. "Well, seeing as how Mister Malfoy is about to win, I think I'll allow you to finish."

Ron glared up at Snape for a moment, and received a glare in return. However, Snape hovering by the board and glaring soon threw his game, and Draco was quick to press this advantage. "Ha!" he finally called, triumphantly. "Checkmate, Weasley."

Ron did his best to ignore Snape, and stood, reaching across the table to shake Draco's hand. "Good game, Malfoy. We'll have to do it again. Gryffindors don't tend to be the best Chess players, you know?"

Draco couldn't stop a true smile from breaking through. "I think I'd like that, Weasley. Maybe next time?"

Ron grinned back, but Snape was quick to interrupt. "Perhaps not. I won't take points tonight, as you were not wandering the halls, but if I find any of you in here after hours again, I most undoubtedly will. Do we understand each other, gentlemen?"

All five boys nodded. Snape focused on Orion. "And Mister Malfoy, if I find you breaking *any* more rules, I *will* give you detention. I would suggest you watch your step." He looked away from him. "I believe I should escort you up to Gryffindor Tower, Mister Weasley. I trust the rest of you can find your way back to Slytherin without getting into any further trouble?"

"Yes, sir," Draco responded.

Snape took Ron by the elbow and guided him from the room. Orion quickly helped Draco pack up the set, and they quickly returned to their dorm. Once Vince and Greg had dropped off to sleep, Orion felt Draco climb onto the end of his bed. "Ori? Are you asleep?" he whispered.

“No. It looked like that was a good game.”

“It was. Weasley surprised me.”

Orion tried to suppress the smile at Draco’s admission. “He seems like a good chess player.”

“Are you kidding? He was amazing!” Draco shifted, and when he spoke again, Orion could hear the glare in his voice. “But you know that if you tell Weasley that, I’ll deny it.”

“Right, Drake,” Orion grinned.

Kateri1 – thank you.

Mirie– No, sorry about that. The chapter was already getting longer than my usual chapter, so I had to wait. But this one’s all chess. Hope you like it. Yeah, Ron always struck me as a bit immature, but being alone a bit more than in canon, I think he’s having to grow up a bit, you know? Just cause Lucius says it doesn’t mean that Snape has to do it. I still think he’ll come around, though.

The Shadow Bandit – Sorry if you aren’t enjoying the meetings. They’ve met everyone I want them to know, so they’ll become less of a focus now, but the meetings will continue through the entire time they attend the school. Though after this year, it’ll be more like a common room for all the friends that Orion gathers around him.

PingPong5 – Well, I’m still working on the permutations for the PS plot, but it’s starting to come together. All the friendships in this story will start out surrounding Orion. But that doesn’t mean that they won’t end up friends… ;) Ah, POC. And what’s wrong with it just being about Johnny and Orlando? :D

Nicoletta – Yep, and this chapter confirms it. As for Snape, yep, he probably will make everyone suspicious. :)

Kento– Glad you like it. Here’s the chess match.

Mystical Witch – okay, while I admit it's possible that Draco might get over his hatred of Muggle-borns in this fic, and ask out Hermione once or twice, I adamantly refuse to write any Harry/Hermione fics in any form, so that's pretty much nixed. And seeing as how I'm a fairly rabid Ron/Hermione, they will probably end up together.

The Vampire Story Hunter – Sorry about that. But you have to admit it was fun watching Lucius knocked down a peg, right? :D

Azntgr01 – Well, she's pretty much the same as the Hermione in canon, so it shouldn't be too long before she's part of the "gang." :)

Risi– Well, people will get suspicious, but maybe not about Orion… ;) Yes, she will meet the troll in this story.

Jedi Buttercup – Well, we've still got to deal with the PS story, so there might be other things for people to assume about Snape. :) Glad you're enjoying the meetings.

SnakeDynasty– Well, I'm glad you like my Slytherin!Harry. I hope you continue to enjoy, even though Orion won't be on the House team this year. I promise that both Malfoys will eventually be on the team, though.

JerseyPike– Sorry to hear about your computer. Hope things are working better. I agree about being raised by the Malfoys, but I don't think that that would really change the core of who Harry is.

Slytherisa– Glad you like it. Keep reading.

HermioneGreen – Glad you're enjoying it. The troll should be coming along shortly.

And for anyone who's interested, Foodie and I have started a new Yahoo!group, called The Malfoy Family Saga. Come check us out! The link's in my bio.

13\

The First Step

The weekend came and went, and time moved on. The meetings still happened with regularity, and Ron now came every time, often playing chess with Draco the entire time. Orion met so many new kids, it was hard to keep them straight. Justin Finch-Fletchly seemed stuffy, and his friend Ernie MacMillan was a complete bore. Terry Boot wasn't much better, and seemed to enjoy bossing everyone around, but Orion was startled at how well he got on with Susan Bones. However, they made no new friends, and soon Dumbledore agreed that the meetings themselves weren't necessary, but he encouraged the boys to continue to meet there, and invite any new friends they made to come along.

Classes were beginning to get interesting. Homework was more than simple rephrasing of the texts to prove they had read them. McGonagall had started them on more complex transfigurations, and many evenings were spent in the common room trying to get the idea of each transformation down. Flitwick's classes were quite easy, and therefore rather fun, though Draco and Orion seemed to be the only ones for whom this was true. Herbology was okay, but a tad on the dull and dirty side.

But the worst classes were Quirrell's and Snape's. Quirrell was so quiet, that half the time, even if he wasn't stuttering, you couldn't understand a word he said. And as for Snape…Draco and Orion had so looked forward to his classes, but now they began to wonder why. The man went out of his way to make Orion's life miserable. Any time he raised his hand to answer a question, he was purposefully ignored, and if he forgot himself and answered a question without thinking…Draco was on the verge of calling in Lucius, but Orion didn't want to do that. He could handle this…whatever it was. Perhaps he'd upset Professor Snape somehow. He'd just have to do whatever he could to make it up to him. Perhaps he'd go talk to him some evening. But with homework and spending time with Draco, Ron, Vince and Greg, there was very little time left in his day.

One afternoon in Defense Against the Dark Arts, Quirrell seemed to be even worse than usual. He spoke barely above a whisper, and neither boy could understand a word the man said. By the end of the class, Orion's head was throbbing, and as he and Orion left the room, he began to feel quite dizzy.

Draco caught him before he could slump to the floor, however. "Ori? Are you okay?"

Orion shook his head, then groaned as it began to throb harder from the shaking. Draco led him carefully up to the Hospital Wing, where the Matron looked him over. "Mister Malfoy, what have you been up to now?" she asked pertly.

"We were leaving class when he just started looking rather…pale, ma'am."

The nurse pursed her lips. "I see." She began to examine Orion's head. "Where does it hurt, Mister Malfoy?"

Orion pointed to the spot on his head, near the middle of his forehead, but over his right eye. Most of the pain seemed to radiate from that spot. It was quite odd, because Draco was the one who tended to get headaches all the time. Orion could only remember one time, a great many years ago, when he had another headache, but that had been nothing like this.

Madam Pomfrey hmmed for a few minutes, then turned to Draco. "I need you to go get the Headmaster. The password to his office is 'gumdrop.'"

"Yes ma'am." Draco sped from the room. He returned several minutes later, Dumbledore close behind, and hurried to the bed Orion lay in.

"What is it, Poppy?" Dumbledore asked.

"There seems to be something odd about Mister Malfoy, Headmaster. I don't think that this is a normal headache. When I looked at his forehead, it was almost at though something was

directing me away from where the boy was indicating the pain came from. Why on earth would he have a spell like that on him?"

Dumbledore frowned. "How…odd. Let me see what I can do."

She nodded. "I need to get the boy a potion anyway. I'll be right back."

Dumbledore approached the two boys. Orion seemed to be out cold now, and Draco looked ready to hurt anyone who came near. "Mister Malfoy, would you mind stepping aside? I need to examine your brother's forehead."

Draco looked worried. "You won't…hurt him, will you?"

Dumbledore smiled. "Of course not. He'll be just fine." He moved to Orion's side, and cast a spell. "Aperio Magus." At once, Orion's face lit up, glowing brightly around his eyes, hair, and forehead. "Curious." He cast "Finite Incantatum" on the spell over Orion's forehead, and was startled to see a scar where the boy had complained of pain.

Draco's eyes were saucers. "What did you do to him?"

Dumbledore smiled calmly. "I only cast a spell to see what spells might be active on your brother currently."

"But…what's all that stuff? On his eyes and hair?"

"Well, I think those are the spells your father used to attempt to conceal him from me."

Madam Pomfrey returned to the bed with a potion bottle in her hand, and nearly dropped it when she saw the spell tracings on Orion's face. "Headmaster! What is going on?"

"Don't be alarmed, Poppy. The boy is fine. He's simply got a few…charms on him. I think this," he indicated the scar, "However, is the root of his problem today."

“I…I see.” She examined the scar carefully, then woke Orion to give him the potion she had brought. When he had recovered slightly, she turned to the Headmaster once more. “I don’t know what is going on here, Headmaster, but I can tell you one thing. That is no ordinary scar. A scar like that could only come from surviving a curse. And I’ve never quite seen it’s like before, so I’m unsure which curse the scar may have been caused by. As for the pain…” she turned to look at the brothers. “I would advise you to come to me immediately if you have any further pain, Mister Malfoy. I don’t want to hear that you collapsed somewhere simply because you were too pigheaded to come to me for a potion to relieve the pain.” With that, she sniffed. “I suppose that since you seem to have recovered a bit, you can return to your common room. But take it easy. No straining your eyes tonight. I’ll write you a note. If you have problems with any of the professors, just give it to them, got it?”

Orion nodded and slid off the bed. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me. Just don’t come back with yet another malady, got it?” she glared at him.

Orion ducked his head. “Yes, ma’am.”

Poppy wrote out a quick note, handed it to Orion, and the two boys left the hospital wing.

The rest of the week went quickly, and for some reason, Snape seemed a bit more subdued in Potions that week. Orion thought that Madam Pomfrey or Dumbledore must have told him what had happened, and he felt guilty about how he had been treating Orion. He did catch Snape looking oddly at his now-visible scar, though.

That night, no new “friends” came to talk. Ron was a bit distracted, and stared at the scar for several minutes before Orion told him to “Stare at something else already!”

Ron flushed. “Sorry, mate.” He looked away, but looked back. “Does…does it hurt?”

Draco snorted. “What do you think, Weasel?” He still liked to egg Ron by calling him that every now and then.

“Just curious, Malfoy.”

“Chill out, guys. No, Ron, it doesn’t hurt. It’s just a scar.”

“Where’d you get it from?”

“Don’t know. I didn’t even know I had it.”

“Really? Weird!”

“Whatever, Weasley, come on, time to lose!” Draco said as he pulled out the chessboard.

But the thought stuck with Orion through the weekend. When had he gotten that scar? Was it just a scar? Perhaps it was time to ask Lucius. He sat down Monday night and wrote out a letter.

Lucius,

Something else has come to my attention. I seem to have a scar on my forehead that I never knew about. My friend Ron was asking about it, and I didn’t know what to tell him. Do you know where the scar might have come from?

Orion

He sent Saiph off with the letter and forgot about it. It took nearly a week before Lucius responded.

Orion,

I will say this once and once only. You are *not* to spend any more time with that Weasley boy. I have informed his father, and we both agree that you would be better off if you were not friends.

The scar is a souvenir of the night the Dark Lord attacked you. I felt you would be better served not to have such an obvious marking. If you prefer to have it showing, that is your choice, but I wanted to at least give you the choice.

I hope you are working hard in your classes. I would hate to have to discipline you when you come home for Christmas because your marks are not what they should be.

Your father,

Lucius Malfoy

When Orion finished reading the letter, he was livid. How dare he! Telling him who to hang out with? That was none of his business.

Draco looked up from his homework to see his expression. "What's father have to say? You look angry…are you okay?"

"No, I'm not. Read it yourself. Feel free. I need to take a walk. I'll be back in a bit, k?"

Draco, surprised at this vehemence, simply nodded and watched as Orion left the room. This time, Orion went straight to the meeting room. Less chance of running into anyone and possibly hurting them because he was so angry. But when he reached the door, he realized he didn't want to be alone. Draco was out of the question. He'd just take Lucius's side. But Ron might listen…and who cared what Lucius thought, anyway?

He continued on past the door and up to the portrait of the Fat Lady that Ron had shown him once. "Password?" she asked primly.

"I don't know. I just need to talk to someone. Do you know if Ron Weasley is in there?"

"And if he is?" she sniffed.

"Could you let him know I'm here?" he asked hopefully.

"I am *not* a messenger service. You'll just have to wait until someone goes through."

Dejectedly, Orion leaned against the wall. But luck was with him. Within moments, Dean and his friend Seamus had appeared,

obviously coming from the library. Seamus was affable enough to pass on the message, and soon Ron appeared. “Orion. What’s up?”

“Can we talk?”

Ron grinned. “Aren’t we talking now?”

“Privately?”

“Sure, mate.” The two boys walked back to the meeting room, silent for the first time since becoming friends. The two collapsed on a couch, and then Ron, who was burning with curiosity, couldn’t take it any more. “What’s up, mate? I haven’t seen you this down since the first time we talked in here alone.”

Orion snorted. “Yeah, well, the causes are similar. That was about *him* too.”

“Who? Draco? I thought he’d let up on you. Is he bugging you again?”

“No, not him. Lucius,” Orion snarled.

“Lucius?” Ron asked, completely puzzled. “Is he in our year?”

Orion laughed at that. “No. My ‘father.’ But he’s not. Not really.” He hadn’t thought about telling anyone since he’d found out, but only Draco knew, and Orion knew where he stood on the matter. Maybe having someone know who wasn’t personally involved would help.

Ron’s eyes were huge. “What do you mean? Are you and Draco adopted?”

Orion snorted again. “No, Draco’s every inch Lucius’s son. And I wasn’t exactly adopted, per se. Just abducted, I guess.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ever hear of Harry Potter?”

Now it was Ron’s turn to snort. “Who hasn’t? The Boy Who Disappeared? But what’s that to do with you?”

“Well, he didn’t ‘disappear.’ Lucius Malfoy ‘adopted’ him.”

“What do you mean? You have another brother?”

“No. This scar you were staring at the other day? That’s a little present from Voldemort.”

Ron winced at the name, and for a moment, Orion wasn’t sure if the message had quite gotten through. Then realization dawned, and Orion thought Ron’s eyes were going to fall out of his head if he opened them any wider. “You…you’re…Harry Potter? Wow!” Ron was stunned. “But…you can’t be. I mean, Harry Potter has dark hair, and green eyes. I’ve seen tons of pictures.”

Orion tried to calm his response to this. Ron didn’t understand. Maybe it was time to start at the beginning. “Lucius Malfoy decided that I would…” his expression twisted. “…Make a good son. The night Voldemort disappeared, he took me from the wreckage of our home, and cast spells on me to change my appearance.” He tugged his hair. “It’s all a spell. He’s told me that he’ll take it off when I’m ready.”

“But why? I mean, he’s a Death Eater, isn’t he?” Ron asked, cautiously.

Orion grimaced. “Yeah. He is. Was. I don’t know. But it’s why he was there in the first place. I guess he thought…” he frowned. “Well, I don’t know what he thought, but he decided to ‘adopt’ me, kind of a spur of the moment thing. And he wanted to keep Dumbledore from finding me, so he turned me into Draco’s twin.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah.”

“So…so does Draco know?”

“Yeah. We found out at the beginning of the year. Dumbledore told us.”

“You only just found out?” Ron said flabbergasted.

“Yeah.” Orion drew his knees up to his chest. “But I kind of knew before this. I got two letters accepting me to Hogwarts. It’s how Dumbledore found me.”

“Two? Why?”

“Well, one was for ‘Harry Potter’ and the other for ‘Orion Malfoy.’ It was kind of creepy, really.”

“I bet. So…is Dumbledore going to take you away from the Malfoys?”

“Nah. He thinks that since I’m happy, I should stay where I am.”

“But…weren’t the Potters in Gryffindor?”

“Were they? Maybe that’s why Dumbledore wanted me to have these meetings.” He looked up at the room. “How strange would that have been,” he wondered out loud. “A Malfoy in Gryffindor…”

“But, mate, you’re not a Malfoy!”

“No, but nobody else knows that, do they?”

Ron grinned. “Nope. Guess not.” They were quiet for a moment. Then Ron spoke again. “So…who else knows?”

“Well, Lucius, of course. Draco, me, Dumbledore, and now you. And mum, I suppose. If he’s finally told her.” Orion grinned. “What I wouldn’t give to be a fly on that wall…” He stared off into space for a moment before turning back to his friend. “But I need you to promise me, Ron, that you won’t tell anyone.”

Ron looked startled, but nodded. “Of course, mate. Whatever you say. Nobody’d believe me anyway.”

SilverKnight7 – Good question. Guess we’ll have to see, won’t we?

SlythCat19 – Glad you liked it. Everybody’s so upset at Snape…I’m only making him like canon… :D

Kateri1 – So glad you liked it. Totally confused my beta-reader, as she's never played before, but promised that I'd teach her (not that I'm any good…).

Mirie – Glad it was worth it. I worked really hard on it, despite not being very good at chess myself. Sorry it was so short, but I figured the match deserved it's own chapter, and there was only so much I could say… Orion does seem to be a good influence on Draco, yes. As for the rest of the first year, you'll just have to wait and find out…

Risi – Ah, but it looks like Orion's already on his way, but Draco's fighting kicking and screaming…

Nicoletta – Glad you liked it. My beta felt the same way. Ah, but it's not just muggle, it's chess… :D Well, knowing Snape's role in PS/SS, you might want to rethink that, just a bit… ;)

Spiffycool – glad you enjoyed it. But you know that Draco now only feels more challenged to beat him, right? :D

Hermionegreen – glad to hear it.

Rofro05 – There will be a lot more of Snape in this version of the story than there is in the original. And I really don't think he can spend as much time with Orion as he'll have to and not revert back to the "Uncle Sev" he knew growing up. :) But he's quite stubborn, so it could be a while…

JerseyPike – No, he wasn't treated the same as he had been at the Dursleys, but there are other things that would be the same. I tend to believe that there are two factors on a person's personality. External and Internal. External does have a very strong pull, but deep down, there are some "feelings" is the best way I can put it, that aren't affected by external forces. I think those things, the "Gryffindor" part of Harry/Orion, will still be there. Just deeper buried.

Sword Wielder-Firebreath – I don't think he'll confront Snape. It's not his way. That's what Draco's for… :D

Akuma-sama – glad you still like it. I'm working on weaving in the plot slowly. The 'Harry's a Malfoy' was kind of overwhelming. Ah, yes, well the Lucius/Arthur campaign to separate their sons has now officially started. Wait till next chapter. ;D Ah, well, aside from Harry not being in the class that Ron ends up insulting her about, nothing else has really changed…

M.O.J. – Me, too. Didn't used to, but Draco, and to a lesser degree, Narcissa, have taken over my brain, so… So, if they're your third-favorite, who are the first two?

Simply Myself – Glad you liked it, despite its shortness. Ah, I wish I knew where to find a chess set like that, believe me. It came purely out of my Dragon-addled little mind. :D If you do find one, let me know, or send me a pic, or something.

/14\ Bullies

Orion and Ron talked far later into the night than they should have, but both managed to make it back to their common rooms without incident. Orion was pleased by Ron's reaction to his true identity. He had been worried that Ron would freak out, or stop talking to him, or become entirely star-struck or something. Instead, after a few moments of wonder on Ron's part, they had simply settled immediately back into their normal friendship.

He and Ron had spent a great deal of time talking about the letter from Lucius. Orion was furious with Lucius, but Ron was worried. "Your father and mine have never gotten along, and if they're agreeing, that's a big deal, Orion."

"So what do we do, Ron? I'm not giving up the only friend that Lucius didn't force on me. And besides, I like spending time with you. What do I care what he thinks? He's not even really my father."

Ron looked worried. "That's true, mate, but that doesn't keep him from having legal power over you. Unless you want the world to know you as Harry Potter."

No, that wouldn't do, and Orion knew that. "True. But I refuse to let him tell me what to do, Ron. What should we do?"

Ron shrugged, then grinned. "Suppose we'll just have to keep our friendship quiet. Can't let them know we're hanging out together."

"Suppose."

The two boys had hurried off to their separate common rooms shortly thereafter, and Orion was calmed enough by his talk with Ron to be able to go to sleep.

However, the next morning, Orion discovered that Lucius wasn't the only one to have sent a letter. Draco and Orion were chatting about what to expect in Potions that morning when there was an uproar from the Gryffindor table. At first Orion was unsure what had happened, but soon the ringing tones of a Howler made everything crystal clear.

“Ronald Bilius Weasley! How dare you disgrace the family by associating with Dark wizards! I demand that you stop spending time with that Malfoy boy at once!

“Your father and I are worried that you could be drawn into their web of lies, and we cannot allow you to continue down this path. If you disobey, we will know. After all, you have three other brothers at school with you, and I’m sure they’d be more than willing to let us know if you spend any time with the boy.”

Ron’s red face shone across the room as the letter continued to rant and berate him. Orion caught Ron’s eye from across the room, and mouthed, “Potions,” then stood up and left the room rather than listen to the howler any more.

Draco was quick to follow. “What on earth was that about?” he asked quietly as they walked, unable to conceal his grin. Though he had gotten used to being around Ron, and respected him as a chess opponent, he was still not exactly friends with him, and was more than willing to taunt him if the opportunity arose.

“I told father I was friends with a Ron. I guess he figured out who. He said he wrote to Arthur and that we weren’t to associate anymore.”

Draco’s eyes widened. “So that’s what the letter last night was about. It didn’t quite make sense. I mean, I knew he didn’t want you to hang out with him…but…” he looked at Orion, concerned. “Are you going to stop talking to him?”

“No.”

Draco’s eyebrows rose. “But father…”

“He’s *not*…”

Draco covered Orion’s mouth. “Do you *want* everyone to know?” he hissed.

Orion looked around and noticed that all the first-year Slytherins had joined them. Some were looking overly interested in what the

brothers were saying. “I was just going to say, that I won’t let him tell me what to do, Draco. I’m sick of it. Ron’s not a bad bloke, and so it’s too bad for father or Ron’s father if they want to keep us from being friends. I won’t let them.”

Theo Nott moved towards them from the back of their little crowd. “You want to be friends with that muggle-lover?”

“Shut it, Nott,” Draco snarled. “This is none of your business.”

“Maybe it is, and maybe it isn’t. I’m sure your father would love to hear about this, Malfoy.”

Vince and Greg stepped to either side of the twins.

“Shut yer yap, Nott,” Vince said.

“Yeah, like Draco said. Or we’ll have to shut it for you…” Greg said.

Nott backed off, but Zabini hurried to his side, and Orion watched the two boys whispering together. That would not be good. But he’d just have to wait and see what happened. Orion decided that no one was going to push him around anymore. Least of all Lucius Malfoy. He turned his back on the other Slytherins and went back to the common room, picked up his bag, and he, Draco, Vince and Greg walked to Potions class. He’d catch Ron after class, and they could talk then.

They were the first to arrive, and quickly took their usual seats. Ron was next to arrive, and obviously decided to take a stand. He sat next to Draco, with Neville sliding in next to him. Draco looked at him askance.

“Feeling rebellious, Weasley?”

Ron grinned. “No one’s going to tell me who I can be friends with, Malfoy. Not my mum, not your father, and sure as heck not you.”

Draco sniffed, glanced at his brother, then grinned back at Ron. “Maybe you Gryffindors aren’t as bad as I thought. I’ll have to remember that next time you beat me at chess…”

Ron smiled. “You mean tonight, Malfoy?”

Orion smiled to himself. This would be worth everything if Draco and Ron started getting along this well. Maybe this wouldn’t be as bad as he thought. It felt good to realize he had people on his side, too. They silently finished preparing for class as the rest of the students filed in, but they could hear whispers as the others settled themselves into their usual seats. The whispering stopped abruptly when Snape entered.

He strode to the front of the room and scanned the seating arrangements, an eyebrow raised as he saw where Ron and Neville sat, though he made no comment. He turned to the board and waved his wand, causing a list of potion ingredients to appear there. “You will be working in pairs today. I would suggest,” he said, turning to scan the class once more, “that if you usually have problems in this class, you make sure that you are paired with a *competent* student…” at this, he glared down at Neville, and Orion scowled. He knew Snape didn’t like the Gryffindors, but he seemed to take extra special pleasure terrorizing Neville.

“Well,” Snape said with a scowl, “pair up. And get your ingredients. You’ll need most of your time here today to finish the potions.” With that, he turned away from the class, and moved behind his desk.

Orion looked at Draco, who was looking appraisingly at Ron. “Well, Weasley? Want to pair up?”

Ron looked a bit surprised at this, but nodded. “Sure, Malfoy. I’ll go get the ingredients.” He stood up, then realized that this would leave Neville without a partner.

“Hey, Nev,” Orion said before Ron could change his mind. “Wanna be my partner?”

Neville’s eyes grew round, and he glanced up at Snape, who was pointedly ignoring the class as they sorted themselves out. “Sure,” he squeaked. He stood up hurriedly and joined Ron in walking to the storage cupboard. Orion glanced at Vince and Greg, but they were already happily setting up their things, so Orion moved to Draco’s

other side, switching his things with Ron's, and began to set up the cauldron.

The class went well that day, and Orion could see that when Snape wasn't bothering Neville, he actually seemed to understand what Orion was trying to do. He only had to prevent two minor disasters, and by the end of the lesson, they had quite a passable potion. Even Snape could see nothing to pick at, and Orion left in a much better mood than when he arrived.

The six boys made their way up to the Front Hall, then split to go to their separate classes. They'd see each other in Madam Hootch's flying lesson later on, so they knew they'd be able to talk then.

The flying lessons themselves had been going fairly well, and it was only the fact that there were still several people who were only able to hover a few feet from the ground that kept the two classes under Hootch's watchful eyes. Neville, unfortunately was one of these. As timid as he was on the ground, he was ten times worse in the air. Worse, Nott delighted in teasing Neville about it, which only made Neville that much more shaky.

That afternoon, the two classes met in the courtyard, and mounted their brooms. Orion was looking forward to another lovely afternoon of chasing his brother until Hootch called them down. Unfortunately, Nott took the opportunity to take up his usual chorus with Neville, and it looked as though that beautiful afternoon would have to be scrapped. "Hey, Longbottom! How long do you think you'll be able to hold on this time? Maybe this time you can land on something less vital…like your head!"

Orion and Draco looked at Neville, who had already been shaking when he arrived, and as one hurried to his side. Ron was already there. "Ignore him, Nev. He's just trying to get to you," Ron was saying.

"W…well, it w…worked, d…didn't it?" Neville mumbled.

"Neville, ignore him. He's not worth it." Orion said. "Remember Potions today? I thought our potion went very well. If you can do that, you can certainly do this."

Neville looked at him mournfully. “Y…yeah, Orion, b…but you w…won’t be up there to c…catch me if I…m…make a m…mistake, w…will you?”

“Ah, Longbottom, of course you can do this. You don’t need anyone. And anyone who says different is just jealous. With a grandmother like yours, how can you fail?”

Orion looked at Draco askance. He knew that Draco was trying to be reassuring, but he’d seen all the remaining colour drain from Neville’s face at the mention of his grandmother.

He threw an arm around Neville’s shoulders. “Look, Neville, you just have to forget about everything while you’re up there. Nothing else exists, just you and the broom. And it can take you wherever you want to go. Really.”

Neville took a deep breath. “Okay, I…I’ll try, Orion.” He smiled at him. “Thanks.”

And, when everyone mounted their brooms and started for the sky, it looked as though the advice had worked. Right up until Nott buzzed him on his own broom. Neville took one look at the body swooping towards him, shrieked, let go of his broom, and fell six feet to the earth. Hootch was at his side in an instant. “Nott! That will be ten points from Slytherin for distracting a classmate.” She bent down to check on Neville, and he moaned. She helped him to his feet. “Class dismissed. If any of those brooms turn up missing, the offender will get detention for a week.” Then she began to walk Neville into the school to take him up to the hospital wing.

The moment she was gone, Orion rounded on Nott, Draco and Ron on either side of him. He was sick of this twerp always trying to pretend like he was better than everyone. “Bet you thought that was really funny, didn’t you Nott? Like bullying others who are weaker than you? Bet you think that makes you a big man, don’t you?”

However, Nott was hardly alone this time. Zabini stepped to his side. “Yeah, well, just ‘cause he won’t kowtow to you, Malfoy…”

“This has nothing to do with us!” Draco chimed in. “Longbottom wasn’t bothering him, what right did he have to terrify the poor sod that way?”

Then Pansy was there, too. “Because the stupid wimp’s practically a squib, Draco. Why are you even bothering with him? First blood-traitors, now squibs. What next, mudbloods?”

Orion could feel Ron bristle on his other side.

But then Vince and Greg appeared, fists ready.

“Back off, everyone. Do we really want to do this right now, where any teacher could see us?” Orion asked.

He watched as Nott glanced carefully around than took a step forward. “Fine, Malfoy,” he whispered in a growl. “But this isn’t over. Not by a long shot.” He spun on his heel, and Zabini, Pansy, and several of the others followed quickly after.

The boys watched as the other Slytherins disappeared, then Orion turned to Ron. “Sorry about that, mate. Nott’s always been an arse. Hasn’t he, Draco?”

Draco snorted. “Worse. He’s nitwit. Makes the rest of us look like Neanderthals.”

Ron shrugged. “Not your fault. Either of you. Look, I’m gonna go up and see if Nev’s okay.”

“We’ll come with you,” Draco responded. “Make sure that Longbottom knows that not all Slytherins are sods.”

Ron grinned. “Brilliant.” He turned, and noticed the other Gryffindors still stood in a cluster nearby. “Dean?”

Dean looked up from his whispered conversation with Seamus. “Yeah, Ron?”

“I’m gonna go see Nev. Could you take up my stuff up to the dorm for me?”

“Sure, mate.” Dean picked up Ron’s bag, and the Gryffindor crowd began to disperse. Unfortunately, one Gryffindor aside from Ron stayed behind. Granger.

“What do you want, Granger?” Draco sneered.

“I’m coming too.”

Ron glared at her. “Why? We don’t want you coming with us, Granger. Go visit him on your own.”

“You can’t stop me from going, Ronald Weasley.”

Ron glared at her, and was about to respond when Orion interrupted. He was sick of the fighting. He just wanted to see if Neville was okay. “Whatever, Granger. Just keep out of our way, okay?”

The six of them started up the steps to the Hospital wing, and arrived in time to see Madam Pomfrey just finishing bandaging Neville’s arm. She looked up as they entered, then turned back to her patient. “I’d like you to sit here for a moment, Mr. Longbottom, and then you can return to your common room. But you need to be careful with that arm for the next day or so, all right?”

Neville nodded, then looked at the floor. “Hey, guys,” he said quietly.

Hermione hurried to his side. “How are you Neville? Were you badly hurt?”

He shrugged. “I’ve had worse. Just a broken arm. It’s better now.”

The boys gathered around him. “Sorry about Nott, Nev. But don’t worry, we’ll sort Nott out, whatever it takes.” Ron looked at his friend determinedly.

Draco nodded. “Yeah, Nott’s just a bully, Longbottom. Pay no attention to him. If he gives you a hard time, just come get one of us, all right?”

Neville looked up at the two, his eyes wide. “You’d do that for…for me?”

Draco smirked. “And why wouldn’t we, Longbottom? You’re worth twenty of Nott any day of the week.”

Orion nodded. “Draco’s right, Neville. Nott’s just a prat. You just hang with us from now on, okay?”

The smile that spread across Neville’s face was one of the best sights Orion had ever seen. He flushed slightly and looked down at his hurt arm, playing with the bandage on it. “Thanks, guys, that means a lot to me.”

Hermionegreen – glad to hear it. Sorry the update took so long, but they should be shorter again starting now.

Ariana Dumbledore – Glad you’re enjoying it. Hope things will start to pick up from now on, as we’ve barely made it through September.

Akuma-sama – I suppose it’s true they’re a bit more violent in their dislike of her, but I think things will sort themselves out. Ah, yes. Snape and Harry…That will be interesting.

Kateri1 – I had fun doing Ron’s reaction. He reacts big to things, but once he’s used to them, (and he seems to get over that quick) he’s pretty laid back. And I really wanted Orion to have someone aside from Draco to talk with all this about. Eventually everyone will know, but that may take a while, and probably won’t happen this year.

SilverKnight7 – I did. Sorry it took so long.

HPIceAngel– Not quite sure what Harry’s in denial about. Seems to me that Draco’s the one in denial.

Simply Myself – Oooh, India. I would imagine it would be fairly easy to have one made there. I know what you mean. I always find myself intrigued by those horribly expensive chess sets, but really I’m only good enough for the cheap plastic kind. Not that I play with anyone often enough to own one. I think Lucius tends to be especially Malfoy when he’s feeling threatened, and I’m sure all of this is making him

feel horribly threatened. Yes, I'm trying to let "Harry" show through. Just a little.

Oriana8 – Glad you're liking it, and thrilled you like the trio so far. I will be adding Hermione next chapter, still trying to figure out all the logistics, but she'll definitely be there. As will Neville from now on. I always feel he gets horribly ignored by everyone, even in canon.

Nicoletta – I understand what you're saying, and you're not the only one to say it, but Snape has a role to play in this first book, and I honestly don't see him simply accepting that Orion is actually Harry. It's going to take him a while, I think. As for Ron keeping his mouth shut…I honestly hadn't thought of that…oops. That could be a problem, couldn't it?

BlackPhoenixTears– We will be having the Halloween adventure, and Hermione will be joining the growing group. I used to think that a Slytherin Harry made no sense, but honestly, he does often have a quite Slytherin side, and if he had wanted to go there, I do think the hat would have put him there. Thank you for saying it would be OOC of Snape just to like Orion. You're the first to say so. He will get over it, but it will take time. I was planning on three or more, but now I'm unsure. I'll definitely finish the first book, and then see where that leaves me. I'll definitely be taking a long break between years if I do do more.

Lord Archimonde – No.

JerseyPike – Cool. For a psychology class, or what? And who is de Waal? Hey, if I had the money, I'd still be in school. I adore it. :) Ah, well, no slapping of Sev, please. He will redeem himself. But I think Dumbledore can defend himself. :D

SS2Megami-sama – no problem. Hiatus simply means a break. It's usually used for teachers who take a quarter, semester, year, etc. off to work elsewhere, or on a book, etc. I just meant that I wouldn't be updating a bit. Glad you like the story.

Kareneleaine – Glad you like the story. Snape's Snape. Which is to say, that he's an inflexible, obnoxious busybody who thinks things

should be the way he thinks they should be. But I love him anyway. :D

ShadoQuirk– Glad you like it. I figured Lucius couldn't say that Harry was a year younger than Draco, as that would have been much harder to fake, so…twins. He definitely has feelings for Harry. I think he cares for him as much as he cares for Draco, though with Lucius that may not mean a lot. But he seems to want more than simple control over Harry. It might have started out that way, but I don't think he sees Harry as just a tool any more.

Calimora– yeah, well, it was either him or Crabbe or Goyle, and they would have parroted whatever Draco said, so…Glad you're enjoying it.

Dirbatua– glad you like it.

/15 Halloween

Time moved on. October came, and the weather began to turn cooler. Now that classes were becoming more difficult, less time was available to spend with Ron, though he and Neville often met with the Slytherins in their little meeting room. Ron and Draco playing chess, while Neville and Orion sat and rooted them on. Draco was grudging in his friendship with the two Gryffindors, but Orion could see there was a touch of respect there. Though Neville was shy and painfully awkward, he was still brave enough to stand up to the brothers when he truly needed to. Orion watched as Draco's respect for the two Gryffindors grew, and was pleased. He didn't want to lose Draco, but he honestly enjoyed the time spent with the other two boys, and wouldn't have given it up for anything. After all, they were nothing like the friends Lucius had chosen for them.

Though they were unable to be on the team, Draco and Orion began to attend the Slytherin team's Quidditch practices, Greg and Vince in tow. Orion was convinced he could beat Higgs to the Snitch any day, and Draco was sure that he was faster than several of the chasers. Next year would be their year, they promised each other. They always came in from the practices flushed, their eyes glowing, and unable to concentrate on much else for the rest of the afternoon.

The other Gryffindors seemed bemused, or as in Hermione Granger's case, upset by Ron and Neville's friendship with the Malfoy brothers. Ron's older brothers, particularly, caused him a great deal of consternation. Percy, a fifth-year prefect, seemed much more inclined to lecture Ron, but his third-year twin brothers, Fred and George seemed almost torn. They sneered at the Slytherin boys when they approached to speak to Ron if they were nearby, but they were still quick to defend Ron from their elder brother, often telling him to "Sod off, Perce." Or "Leave him alone. He's not hurting anyone." But that didn't mean they approved. Still, no further Howlers arrived, and for that all of the boys were pleased.

One Saturday afternoon, Orion, Draco, Vince and Greg were helping Ron carry a stack of books up to Gryffindor Tower. Ron had a report due on Monday, and had, as usual, left everything to the last moment, so he was planning on spending all Sunday working on his report.

"Lord, Weasley, do you always put off your homework this much?" Draco was complaining, despite the fact that he had the smallest stack of books of the group.

"Aw, don't tell me you never put any homework off, Malfoy. Never waited to the last minute to do an assignment? Besides, there's so much to do, you know? I just kind of forgot about it."

"I always start my assignments the day they're assigned, Weasley. After all, I want the best marks possible. Father wouldn't accept any less. And what exactly was taxing you so that you forgot an assignment this big? Lunch? Drooling over the Quidditch players?" Draco snorted.

Orion couldn't help but smile as the two boys continued to banter in this way as they made their way up the staircase, following only a few steps behind. He could tell the two boys actually enjoyed their banter, and he was willing to put up with anything that suggested they might be getting along. He was so distracted by his amusement that he didn't notice when the stairs moved away from the landing they were heading for, and was startled by Ron's shouted "Hey!" The five boys held on tight as the stairs readjusted themselves, then hurried up the steps as fast as they could with their burdens before the stairs decided to move again.

When they reached the hallway, they all looked around, and even Ron, who spent more time in the upper floors of the school, wasn't quite sure where they were. Draco glowered. "Great, Weasley. Should we just wait here until someone comes to rescue us?"

Ron shot a quick glare in Draco's direction before spinning around in place, trying to figure out which was the best way to go. It was a three-hallway juncture, and each looked much the same as the others to Orion. Finally, after several minutes, Ron came to a decision. "Well, this way looks vaguely familiar…maybe if we just walk this way for a bit, it'll start to look a bit more familiar…"

Draco snorted. "So we're just supposed to wander around the school blindly, in hopes that we'll find a way up to your tower? Why don't we just go back down the staircase?" The boys turned back to where the staircase had been, there was simply a banister, no stairs at all.

"Damn." Draco turned to Ron. "You know, Weasley, if I get in trouble because of you, you *will* regret it."

"Oh, chill out, Draco. It's not like any of us could have predicted that the staircase would move. Give Ron a break." Orion turned to the Gryffindor. "This way, Ron?" he pointed off in the direction Ron had indicated originally. Ron nodded, and the group began to move off along the chosen hallway.

They reached another juncture several minutes later, a t-juncture, and Ron spent several minutes trying to decide before the group suddenly heard a horribly familiar cackle. "Peeves!" Ron looked quickly in the direction of the sound before quickly leading the rest of the group down the other hall, which soon turned a corner, and ended abruptly in a locked door.

Unfortunately, a moment later, Peeves appeared. "Oooooh! Ickle firsties! And what is yous all doing in this corridor?"

"Leave us alone, Peeves! We weren't bothering you. We'll just be going now," Ron said.

Unfortunately, before the group could pass the poltergeist, Peeves produced a large bag, from which he plucked a bright green water balloon. Lobbing this at Draco with a "Wheee!" he reached into the bag again, this time pulling out two, a red one and a purple one, lobbing these at Ron and Orion. The boys ducked as Peeves continued to lob balloons at them, their way out blocked by Peeves, and the way ahead of them through a locked wooden door.

Draco, already having been pelted by three balloons was soaking and furious. He turned to the door, shouted "Alohamora!" and all five boys quickly hurried through the door as Peeves shouted some incoherent sing-song chant behind them. Unfortunately the hall on the other side of the door was far from unoccupied. Even more unfortunately, its occupant was the biggest, meanest looking dog the boys had ever seen. Even though the monstrosity was asleep, its shoulders still towered above even Vince and Greg's heads. But the worst part about it were its three grizzled, drooling heads, with jaws that looked strong enough to split them in half.

Vince and Greg were the first to crack. Shrieking at the top of their lungs, they dropped the books they had been carrying for Ron, tore at the door handle, and were gone from the room in a flash. This, though, woke the up-till-then sleeping monstrosity, and the creature began to growl at the remaining three before lunging at them. They were only just able to jump back through the door and pull it closed before the dog smashed into it.

The three boys hurried down the hall, Vince and Greg nowhere to be found, and soon found themselves at a staircase, which they hurried down. Arriving at the bottom of the stairs, the three boys paused to catch their breath. Ron was the first to recover. "What the heck is Dumbledore doing, having a monstrosity like that in a school?"

"I know," Orion panted. "It's insane!"

But Draco was quieter. "I don't know. Dumbledore may be a bit odd, but I can't imagine him putting students at risk. I mean, father always calls him a do-gooder. That hardly seems the action of a do-gooder…" he mused.

"Well, he did warn us to stay away from that floor. Just wish we'd known that's where we were…" Ron said.

"But why have the thing in the school? There must be some reason…"

But Draco's musings were interrupted by a groan from Ron. "Damn. Vince and Greg had most of my books! Now what am I supposed to do?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Next time, Weasley, don't put it off till the last minute, and it won't matter. He handed Ron the books he had been carrying. "I'm going back to Slytherin before you find something even more *interesting* to delay your paper." He turned to his brother. "Coming?"

Orion shook his head. "See you back in the commons, Draco. I'll help Ron with what he's got left." The boys separated, Ron and Orion heading up a new staircase, and Draco making his way down to the dungeon.

The next few weeks passed quickly. Mid-term was approaching, and the teachers had now covered all the basics. Much of the boys' time was now spent in the Library, or in their house commons. Orion spent as much time as possible in the library with Ron, but Madam Pince, the librarian, looked down on talking in the Library, and so they were often expelled from the room for talking too loud.

It took three occasions of being tossed from the Library before the boys realized that they could use the room Dumbledore had provided as a kind of common room itself. No one but them had access to it, so they could even leave their library books in it without fear of them being stolen. After that, all of the boys did most of their homework in that room instead. Draco helped everyone with their Potions homework, Orion with their Charms work, and Neville showing a surprising aptitude at the Herbology homework.

Soon, however, schoolwork was superceded by the anticipation of the Halloween feast. With only a week left to go, Ron began telling the other boys about some of his brothers' tales from previous feasts. Some years there were dances for the older students, others there were costume balls, or masques. Ron even proceeded to tell them about the time his brother Bill and his seventh-year friends had proceeded to throw a Samhaen banquet of their own, and how the spirit of his great-aunt Vesta had shown up and scared the rest of the approaching spirits away, and proceeded to devour all the food laid out for the ghosts, at least as much as any ghost could.

The boys decided that they would all meet in their room and go down to the feast together on the night of Halloween, so that they would be able to spend at least a little of the holiday together, despite the fact that they would have to eat at separate tables. When Draco and Orion arrived that evening, though, they found Ron in a towering rage.

"What's bitten you, Weasley?"

"That…that…girl!" Ron managed to grind out. He growled, and stormed into the room.

This was more of a temper than Orion had ever seen his friend in before, even when they had tormented him before becoming friends. "What happened?"

Neville covered a nervous laugh with his hand. "She told him he was doing the spell wrong in class, and when he told her to prove it, she did. The first in the class to get it to work, too."

Ron whirled around. "And that idiot Flitwick proceeded to tell her how she was the best student in the class, and gave her twenty points! She'll never let me live it down now!"

Orion and Draco looked at each other, bemused. It was Orion who asked, though. "Who?"

"Hermione Granger! Who else?" Ron growled.

Neville nodded. "Of course, after the class, Ron was complaining to the rest of us boys about her, and she heard and went rushing past…Lavender Brown says she's still in the girls' lav. Won't come out. She said she's been crying the whole afternoon."

"Serves the busybody right," Draco drawled. "Come on, don't want to miss the feast." And he turned and left, the others following in his wake, Ron still grumbling under his breath.

Now, Draco and Orion were used to fabulous feasts at the Manor, but they were entirely unprepared by what they found when they arrived in the Great Hall. There were huge pumpkins scattered throughout the room, bigger than any jack-o-lantern the brothers had ever seen before, with huge candles shining from their immense, gruesomely carved faces. All along the tables, smaller jack-o-lanterns had been set as centrepieces. The tables themselves had been draped in black cloths, and trimmed with orange ribbons. The sky above was beautifully clear, and the full moon was almost completely free of clouds.

The quartet grinned at each other for a moment, then separated and hurried to their house-tables, excited to see what the house-elves had cooked up for dinner. The feast was the biggest they had had since the welcoming feast. There were huge bowls of spiced pumpkin soup, roast beef, chicken, and even ham. There were four different kinds of vegetables, and huge baskets of the flakiest bread the boys had ever eaten. After supper had disappeared, it was replaced by tons of puddings and huge mounds of every sweet the boys had ever seen.

They gorged themselves on licorice whips, chocolate frogs and lollypops, and filled their pockets with extra treats for later.

However, as they were eating, the doors to Great Hall slammed open, and Professor Quirrell stumbled in. He ran down the Hall, between the Ravenclaw and Gryffindor tables and towards the teachers' table, shrieking "Troll! Troll in the dungeon!" Then promptly fainted. For a moment, there was no sound in the Hall at all, not even the sound of chewing. Then chaos erupted. Children shrieked, chairs were thrown back, and several of the younger children scurried to find comfort with their older siblings, wherever they sat.

Then Dumbledore's voice cut through the bedlam. "Silence, please!" Everyone in the Hall stood stock still. He was standing in front of his chair, his eyes blazing. Orion could begin to see why Lucius had given in to the man. He radiated a sense of power. "Prefects, please take your housemates back to your houses. Teachers, follow me." With that, he turned and left the table, followed quickly by the rest of the teachers. All but one. Orion watched as Snape hurried to the opposite side of the teacher's table from where the rest were headed, and disappeared through a door.

Orion turned to see if Draco had noticed, and discovered that his brother was halfway to the doors of the hall. "Draco, wait!" he called. Draco turned back to see him, and hurried to his side. "Come on, Ori! We don't want to be left alone here with a troll loose!"

"But Snape! I just saw him split off from the rest of the teachers. Why would he do that?"

"You mean he didn't go with the rest of them?"

Orion shook his head. "No. He went through the other door. The one over there," Orion pointed to the door. "Come on, I want to see what he's up to. He's been acting odd all term."

Draco paled. "But…"

"Come on, Drake!" Orion pulled his brother's sleeve, and hurried to the door, then through it, intent on finding out just what was going on with his head of house.

HermioneGreen – Glad you like the friendship angle. It feels like there are quite a few people who don't. But Ron's not a bad chap, and I adore Nev, so… :)

Bes – Glad you like it, here's another chapter.

SheWolf7 – Glad you like my twist. I try to go with ideas I don't see done over and over again. And while I've seen a lot with him raised by Snape, and put in Slytherin, I've never seen him as part of the Malfoy clan, and they seem to be the family that come to me most often as plot bunnies. ;) Yes, Orion and Lucius will make up to a degree. But their relationship will never be quite the same. And, if I DO end up doing more, it's going to be interesting to see how it changes Lucius. Snape's a problem. Cause he knows Orion, but he wants to hate James's son, so he's got a dilemma on his hands. It'll take him a while to sort it. But he and Orion will be closer and friendlier than Harry and Snape ever were.

I-Like-Chickens – Here you go.

Sak – Very glad you're enjoying it. I adore the idea of the inter-house relationship being changed by Harry, cause if anyone could do it, it would be him. Draco has gone from one of my least-favorite characters to one who is in nearly all my fics. I just adore him. Particularly in concert with Harry. They play off each other so well.

Spiffycool – I adore Nev, so I had to. And yes, Hermione will become part of their group, though not quite as easily as in canon. I do have a few plans for Susan, too, but I'm not sure if they'll make it in. Glad you're enjoying it.

Silver Scale Serpent – Always good to have a worshiper around. Hope you enjoyed this chapter as well.

Cleo-n-Jules – Glad you're enjoying it, but, ummmm…could you keep the chanting down so that I can focus on the troll scene? ;)

/16 A Puzzle

While the Malfoy brothers disappeared off after their head-of-house, their Gryffindor friends were realizing that they, too, had a mission. As Ron and Neville trailed after Percy, Neville was struck by a thought. Hermione had never shown for dinner. What if she was still in the girl's bathroom? Neville tugged on Ron's sleeve just as they left the hall with the rest of their housemates.

"Ron, what about Hermione?"

Ron turned to his friend and made a face. "What about the busybody?"

"Well, there's a troll out there, and she's all alone. What if she's still in the girl's lav?" Neville, quite unlike the rest of their little group, got along quite well with Hermione. When he was not off spending time with Ron and the Malfoy brothers, he often spent time with Hermione in the library or in the common room. He considered her a friend as much as he considered the boys his friends. He couldn't just leave her to her own devices. What if the troll found her? He'd never forgive himself if she got hurt.

"What of it, Nev? I mean, do you really want us to lose points?"

Neville looked abashed. "Well, no, but I don't want Hermione to get hurt, either, Ron, and you know if that troll finds her…"

Ron sighed and looked away from his friend. Most of the rest of their housemates had disappeared up the stairs, and Percy was nowhere to be seen. "Do we have to? Couldn't we just tell someone?"

"Who? All the teachers are off trying to find the troll, and all the prefects are up in their dorms, or on their way there!"

"All right, all right. But I'm doing this under duress. If we get in trouble for this and get a detention, you get to do all the hard work. And if Percy sees us, this was *your* idea."

Neville nodded. "Sure, just…come on!" he said, hurrying down the hall towards the girl's bathrooms.

The two boys hurried down the hall, then Ron heard a shuffling sound and pulled his friend to a stop. "Nev…what's that?"

Neville's eyes grew round. "I…I think it's…the troll!"

The boys ducked into an alcove, listening as shuffling footsteps grew closer to their hiding place. But, instead of the huge hulking monstrosity they were expecting, they saw Quirrell rush by, a determined look on his face. It was a look quite unlike any either boy had ever seen on their teacher's face before. Once Quirrell had disappeared around the corner, the two boys hurried on again.

Unfortunately, before they could reach Hermione, something else beat them to her: the troll. Just as they rounded the corner of the hallway to the girl's bathroom, the troll rounded the corner at the other end of the corridor. Ron, seeing the creature, dragged Neville behind the nearest suit of armour, and the two boys trembled as the creature shuffled closer.

Before the creature reached the spot where the boys hid, Hermione decided at just that moment that she was through crying over a jerk like Ron Weasley, and exited the bathroom so that she could head down to the banquet before all the food was gone. However, upon exiting the bathroom, she found herself face to face with the troll.

For a moment, there was dead silence in the hall. Then Hermione screamed, and backed up against the wall, having already moved too far away from the door to duck back inside. At the same moment, the troll took a great swing with his club, bringing it down right where she had been standing only moments before. At Hermione's screams, the two boys sprang from their hiding place and hurried to help their classmate. But what could they do? What help could two untrained wizards be?

They looked at each other for a moment, then Hermione screamed again, and Ron's resolve stiffened. He nodded to himself, turning to examine the troll once more. "Look, we've got to get that club from him, Nev. Any ideas?" Neville shook his head. "Fine. You go around the other side of him and we'll try to distract him from Hermione, okay? Shout at him, find things to throw at him, whatever. Maybe if we can just get her away from him, that'll be enough?"

Neville nodded, and Ron watched as his friend carefully edged along the wall behind where the troll stood, menacing Hermione. When Neville began to look around himself for something to throw, Ron took his chance. "Oi! Ugly! Look this way!"

The troll stopped mid swing, and began to turn in Ron's direction. Seeing a new target, he took a few shuffling steps towards Ron before Neville found a loose stone and tossed it at the troll's head. This, however had absolutely no effect on the creature.

Ron began to back up, but now Hermione had recovered a bit from the shock that had hit her upon seeing the creature. Her wand was out in a second, and with the shouted words "Wingardium Leviosa," the troll's club floated from its grip, and floated above its head. It swung at Ron before realizing that it no longer held the club, and began to look around for its weapon.

Spying Neville, he began to advance on the other boy who started to quiver in fear. Hermione, seeing her friend in danger, released the spell just as the troll stepped under its weapon. The club came down swiftly on the creature's head with a loud crack, and it toppled to the floor directly at Neville's feet, landing with a great thud that shook the walls and floor. The three looked at each other and sighed with relief.

Meanwhile, the Malfoy brothers had followed their Head of house down the back corridors and up several staircases until they found themselves in a very familiar hallway. They quickly hid behind a nearby statue and watched as Snape strode back and forth in front of the door which housed the huge monstrosity they and their friends had discovered only a few weeks before.

When nothing more happened for several minutes, the two began to whisper to each other. "What do you think he's up to, Drake?"

Draco shook his head. "Not sure, Ori, but I'll bet you anything he's guarding the door to see if anyone's trying to sneak past that beast tonight."

Orion's eyes grew round. "You think? Who on earth would want to do that?"

Draco snorted quietly. "Why would probably be a better question, Ori. I mean, it's obvious to me that the creature's there for a reason. It must be guarding something."

"You think so?"

"Um hm…But what could be so important that Snape doesn't trust that creature to be deterrent enough?"

"I don't know, but it's obviously important to Dumbledore and Snape…"

They waited for several more minutes before they heard footsteps approaching, and watched as Snape hid in the shadows along the dead-ended corridor. Shortly after, Professor Quirrell came into view. He hurried towards the door, then stopped abruptly when Snape stepped out of the shadows. Orion hissed in pain as Quirrell backed away from Snape. Draco turned to his brother, but Orion shook his head, indicating he was all right.

"P…Professor…Sn…Snape! Fancy meeting y…you here. I was…just checking to see that no one had tried to get past the b…beast."

"I see, Quirrell. Well, rest assured, the stone is quite safe. No one will be taking it tonight."

Quirrell trembled for a moment, then nodded. "W…well, good! After all, w…we wouldn't want it to f…fall into the wr…wrong hands."

Snape's mouth curled into something halfway between a sneer and a smile. "No, we wouldn't want that. Perhaps you and I should have a little…chat sometime, Quirrell…"

Quirrell smiled tremulously. "I…I'm sure that would be lovely, P…pr…professor. P…perhaps sometime when things aren't quite so…busy."

Snape sneered down at the other man. "Perhaps."

"W..well, Pr…professor, I'll just be going…" But before he could finish his statement, a loud scream came from one of the lower floors. The

two professors quickly hurried down the hallway towards the stairs, and after a moment, the brothers followed.

As they hurried after their two professors, the brothers could hear loud crashing sounds coming from below, and every so often, a bellow. They knew it must be the troll, and hastened their steps. They didn't want to suddenly find themselves alone with the monster.

They entered the hallway several metres behind the two professors, and ducked behind a nearby statue before peeking out at the scene in the hall. The troll lay on its stomach, and had obviously been knocked out. There were pieces of broken statues and small stones littered across the hallway. The bathroom door hung from its hinges, and standing in the middle of the rubble were three familiar figures: Ron, Neville, and Hermione.

And they were cowering before the enraged form of the Deputy Headmistress, Minerva McGonagall. She was shrieking at them at the top of her lungs. "…What on Earth possessed the three of you to do something so entirely foolish! That will be detention, I think, for all three of you!"

At this, Hermione raised her head. "Professor, please, if anyone here should get detention…"

Draco snarled. "Tattletale! She's going to tell on Weasley. The little apple-polisher!"

"Miss Granger," McGonagall's sharp voice cut through Draco's grumbling. "If you think you will be able to wiggle out of detention…"

"No, ma'am. It's not that. It's just, well, Neville and Ron only came looking for me because they knew I'd gone after the troll. I'd read all about them, and I thought I'd be able to handle it. But if they hadn't been here…Well, I'd be dead, ma'am."

McGonagall gaped at her favourite student. It was one thing to hear that three first years had tried to tackle a troll. It was quite another to hear that one first year had felt they could handle it all by themselves. "Miss Granger! You foolish girl! Very well, you boys will receive five points each for their concern over a fellow student. But you, Miss

Granger, will be coming to my classroom every evening this week to help me clean it up." She looked down her nose at the three students, who looked up at her, amazed. "Well? Off to your common room. I think that's about enough excitement for one night." The three nodded and started off down the hall.

When the trio passed the brothers' hiding spot, Orion hissed to them. "Ron! Nev!"

Both boys paused, then looked back at where the teachers were conferring over the troll, their backs turned away.

"Draco, Orion! What are you guys doing out here?"

Draco shushed them both. And waved them to follow him. The group soon found themselves in a familiar hall, and quickly entered their little meeting room. It was only after Draco had shut the door behind them all that anyone spoke. As he looked over their little group, he noticed an addition. Hermione Granger had followed as well. "What do you want, Granger? Haven't you made enough trouble yet?"

The girl glared at him, but it was Neville who responded. "Don't Draco. She's my friend. She didn't do anything wrong."

Draco raised his eyebrow. "Fine. She can stay, this time. But don't consider it an invitation."

"Like I'd want to be anywhere near you, Malfoy." She stormed over to the couch and slumped into it, her arms crossed.

The four boys looked at each other for a moment, then Neville spoke. "What were you guys doing in that hall? Why aren't you back in your common room like everyone else?"

Draco smirked. "What, Longbottom, you and Weasley are the only ones allowed to wander around the halls?"

Neville flushed, and Orion shot a look at his brother. "Ignore him, Nev. He's in a mood. We followed Snape."

Ron's eyebrows shot up. "Snape? Why would you follow that…" He shot a glance at Draco, and quickly changed his phrasing. "Why would you follow him?"

"Because, Weasley, he didn't follow Dumbledore's lead tonight like the other professors. We wanted to know what he was up to."

Orion nodded. "He's been acting oddly all term. He's known us from when we were young, but he's never been so…" Orion tried desperately to find an inoffensive term, but Draco saved him the trouble.

"…Malicious?" Draco sneered. Ron snorted, and Draco looked at him coldly. "Snape's always been reserved, but he always seemed rather fond of us… I just wish I knew why he was treating Orion this way. At least he hasn't been too bad the last few weeks…"

Orion and Ron looked at each other, then Orion turned to look at Neville appraisingly, before glancing over at the girl who sat watching them from the couch. Draco caught the look, and he knew what it could mean. "No. You can't, Ori. It's not safe. The more people that know…" His eyes pleaded with his brother, but he could see that he simply wasn't getting through. "Fine! Tell Longbottom, but Granger shouldn't…I mean, you have no idea what she might do with the information!"

At this, Hermione jumped up. "Like I want to know your little family secrets, Malfoy. If you don't want me to know, I'll just leave."

But before she could pass by to get to the door, Orion put a hand on her shoulder. "No, Hermione. You deserve to understand. I saw what you did for Ron and Neville tonight. I know you're trustworthy."

Brown eyes looked up into blue-green ones, and after a moment, Hermione nodded.

Orion smiled, and waved the group to the couches. "Neville, Hermione, you're going to want to sit down for this…"

Neville looked at his friend. Orion had always been the more serious of the two brothers, but he'd never seen him quite this solemn. He

took a seat on one of the couches, and Hermione settled at his side. Draco and Ron sat together on the other couch, but Orion remained standing.

Orion took several deep breaths before he looked at his friend and his brother, the first looking encouraging, the other doubtful. Finally he turned to face Neville and Hermione. "My name isn't really Orion Malfoy." Hermione snorted, but Draco sent her a quelling look, and Orion continued. "Lucius Malfoy took me from my parents after they died, and cast spells on me to make me look like this."

Hermione couldn't contain herself this time. "Why on earth would Lucius Malfoy bother with the son of his victims? I mean, they were, weren't they?"

This time it was Ron who came to Orion's defense. "Granger, shut it, okay? This is a big deal, and if you don't want to be in on it, we can just obliviate you now, and you can forget all about everything that happened tonight…" It was a hollow threat, as none of the boys were able to cast the spell yet, but it worked, and Hermione drew closer to Neville, taking comfort from his familiar presence.

Draco spoke up, too. "Before Orion goes any further, I want assurance. Neither of you will tell anyone what is said in this room tonight. None of us will speak of it elsewhere, agreed?"

Ron and Neville nodded agreement, but it was several minutes before Hermione nodded grudgingly. Orion nodded, smiling. If there was one thing he could appreciate in his brother, it was the fact that Draco was always so quick to protect him, from himself or others. He smiled over at Draco and Ron for a moment before continuing.

"Father didn't kill my parents, Hermione. He was just there." He could see the disbelief in her face, but they could cover that later. "He was there when the Dark Lord attacked them, and…when it was over, I was all that was left." After a moment's silence, Hermione's eyes grew large, and Orion watched as they flicked up to his forehead. He could tell things were beginning to add up for her, and nodded. She gasped, and Neville looked worriedly at his friend.

"Don't you see, Neville? He's trying to tell us he's Harry Potter!"

Neville's eyes grew round, and he turned to look at his friend. "You're not, are you, Orion?"

Orion looked at Neville, ruefully. "I am."

Neville gaped at his friend, then turned to Ron and Draco, who were looking at the other two warily. "You guys knew?"

Draco snorted. "Of course I knew, Longbottom. He is my brother, blood or not."

"Lay off, Malfoy. He's just surprised." Ron turned to Neville. "Orion told me last month, shortly after we started spending time together."

But Hermione had now built up a head of steam. "Wait a minute. You live with the man who helped He-who-must-not-be-named murder your parents, and you're okay with this?"

Orion sighed. "What…"

But Draco quickly interrupted him. "You have no idea what you are talking about, Granger. Father saved Orion's life. He would have died if father hadn't taken him in."

Hermione stood, glowering at Draco. "I hardly think that Dumbledore would have left Harry there to die, Malfoy…"

Then Draco was on his feet too. "His name's Orion, Granger!" he snarled.

Orion was quick to step in before blood was shed. "Back off, Draco. It's all right. Look, we all need to calm down a bit." Draco glared at Hermione for a moment, then shrugged, and returned to his seat. Hermione looked uncertain for a moment, then finally rejoined Neville on the couch they had been sharing. Orion sighed with relief. "The point is, up 'till I came here, Professor Snape and I seemed to get along well. But since September, he's seemed off."

"Does he know who you are?" Ron asked. "Cause he obviously favoured the two of you that first day."

Draco nodded. "But just that first class. And then he suddenly started sniping at Orion for no apparent reason. And when I called him on it, he wasn't much kinder to me."

Orion nodded again. "So, we figure he might have found out who I am…"

Hermione's eyes went round again. "You mean none of the teachers know who you really are?"

Draco opened his mouth to answer, but Orion didn't want to listen to more sniping. "No, as far as we know, just Dumbledore, and possibly Snape."

Ron's brow furrowed. "But why would he do that if you're Harry Potter? I mean, what about you being Harry Potter would make him treat you that way?"

Orion shrugged. "I wish I knew."

Draco sighed. "It doesn't really matter anyway. What matters is what we found out when we followed him tonight. He went up to the forbidden hallway, and waited there for a bit. And you'll never guess who showed up."

It was Neville who guessed. "Professor Quirrell?"

"Yep," Orion confirmed. "He came hurrying up, and Professor Snape confronted him, didn't he, Draco?"

"Yes. And that's the weird thing. They stood there talking for a bit, and Snape said something about a stone. I want to know what kind of stone requires that kind of protection?"

Hermione looked puzzled. "What kind of protection?"

Draco smirked. "Weasley lead us up there a few weeks ago. Turns out there's a three-headed dog guarding the passageway."

"Why on earth would Dumbledore have something like that in this school, even if he did warn us?"

Draco looked at her appraisingly. "That's what I wanted to know."

HermioneGreen – Glad you liked it. Here's your answer. What do you think? :D

Risi – They have, but someone else remembered… :D

SheWolfe7 – I think these two together are a lot more independent of Lucius since they have each other to rely on. I'd love to know what you think of what happened… :)

Dumbledore – I'm glad I'm not the only one who believes in inherent goodness. I still think Draco could be redeemed in canon, but I'm beginning to doubt JK will do so. I don't think I'll be touching on Harry's powers much in this fic, at least until the confrontation with Voldy at the end, but we'll see. Hope this was a worthwhile adventure. I'll try to come up with more.

Akuma-sama – heh, well, just because Harry wasn't there… :D Love to hear what you think.

/17

Amends

The group went their separate ways soon after. It was late, and, as Neville reminded them, they were all supposed to be in their common rooms, but they promised to meet up the next day after class to talk again. As the brothers snuck back to their common room, Draco told Orion that they would definitely have to bring Vince and Greg when they did. After all, they didn't want to be outnumbered by Gryffindors, did they?

Orion rolled his eyes, but agreed. At least he wasn't expounding on Granger being Muggleborn anymore, right? He just wondered how long that would last.

The next day went horribly slowly, and by the time classes were over, Orion felt as though a week should have passed. The four Slytherins made their way to the meeting room, and were opening the door when the three Gryffindors appeared down the hall. Hermione was carrying a stack of books.

Draco smirked. "What's that for, Granger? Have some last-minute studying to do? Don't let us detain you."

Hermione glared at him, then swept past him and dropped the stack of books on the table. "I spent lunch looking for any possible references to powerful stones. I think I might have found something, but I need everyone's help narrowing down the possibilities."

Draco sneered. "Does she always do this, Weasley?"

Ron shrugged. "I never hung out with her before. News to me."

Neville hid a smile. "She just gets excited, is all. Come on." He led the rest of the boys into the room and settled next to Hermione.

Orion sat down across from Hermione. "So, what is it that you think you've found, Hermione?"

"Well, all I had to go on was that the dog is guarding some kind of stone. So I looked up what information I could find on powerful stones. Unfortunately, that doesn't narrow the field much. It could be some kind of cursed gemstone, or an obelisk, or a stone tablet…the list goes on and on. So what we really need to figure out is why it's here. That should give us at least some idea of what we're looking for."

Orion could see that Draco was impressed, despite himself. "Still, Granger, that's a heck of a lot of work. And I can't see it helping us much. Perhaps we should start at the other end?"

Hermione gazed unblinking at Draco. "What on earth do you mean by that?"

He smirked. "Don't know everything, do we, Granger? As far as I'm concerned, the best place to start is to figure out where that monster came from in the first place. I mean, there can't be that many three-headed dogs in England, right? And if we find the owner, he might know what the beast is guarding."

Hermione's eyebrows rose, but Orion could tell she was thinking this over. "I suppose that's true, Malfoy, but how do we find out who that is?"

To everyone's surprise, Neville spoke up again. "Maybe we should ask the groundskeeper. Hagrid? He adores animals. He's found Trevor for me several times already. He should know who it belongs to."

Draco sneered at this idea. "That oaf? Please, I can't imagine that creature has anything useful he could tell us."

"And that's just your problem, Malfoy," Ron responded. "You're so busy dismissing everyone's helpfulness that you'll pass up any opportunities that don't fall right into your lap. It's why I always win when we play chess."

Draco didn't respond to this, simply scowling instead.

Orion turned to Neville. "Would you be willing to ask him, Neville? I mean, seeing as you've already talked with him and everything…"

Neville nodded.

"Cool." Orion looked back at Granger. She wasn't so bad, he thought. Just a bit over-enthusiastic. "So, how do we narrow down this list, Hermione?"

She smiled at him, and began to go over exactly what she had found, and the rest of their time was spent devising ways to try to figure out the clues about the mysterious stone that was being guarded in the school. They stopped when it was time for dinner, but made a pact that they would meet at least a couple of times a week to discuss what they found, and to let each other know immediately if any of them found anything that could be relevant.

Between searching for possible stones, doing homework, and watching Quidditch practices, the next two weeks passed in a blur.

Quidditch season began, and with it came a larger sense of competitiveness between Draco and Ron. Both were equally sure that their house teams would be victorious at the first match of the season. Orion honestly wasn't too sure. He'd seen the girl the Gryffindor team had picked as Seeker, and she was barely better than Higgs, in his opinion. The four boys decided to sit together in the Hufflepuff stands, just to keep away from the glares they'd get at their own stands. Ron kept going on about how his brothers were the best beaters this side of the Wimbourne Wasps's Terrence and Bradley. For once Draco had restrained himself and had simply said that they would have to wait and see.

The match took place on a gorgeous November day, though it was quite cold. Ron had convinced Neville to tag along, but Hermione had insisted that this would be their best opportunity to get at books that would otherwise be unavailable, and was annoyed that none of the boys were willing to stay and help her look. So it was that the six boys made their way up to the top of the Hufflepuff stands, Vince and Greg leading the way, and cracking their knuckles at those who tried to suggest that they were in the wrong stands. They cleared out the front bench, and Draco and Ron kept up a running commentary through the entire match. In some ways, Orion thought they were more enjoyable to watch than the match. If there was one thing the

Slytherin Quidditch team was good at, it was cheating. And while Lee Jordan, the announcer, was funny at times, he had a decided Gryffindor prejudice.

The Slytherins were actually doing quite well, until the Gryffindor Seeker swept out of nowhere, practically right in front of the boys, and snatched the Snitch from the air. The game was over. Slytherin had lost, eighty to one hundred and eighty. Ron was in ecstasy. "Hah! Take that, Malfoy!"

Draco snarled at him as they made their way out of the stands. "Just wait until next year, Weasley. There isn't anyone in the world better at Seeking than Orion. And next year you'll never even get a chance to score, because I'll always have the Quaffle." He grinned at this thought, as Ron scowled.

"We'll just see about that, won't we, Malfoy," he growled.

The next morning, at the breakfast table, the boys received a letter from their father.

Draco and Orion,

I hope this missive finds you both well. Your Head of House assures me that you are both finally settling in, and that you are doing well in your studies. I hope this will continue.

Your mother and I have been making arrangements for the coming holidays. I will arrive personally to pick you up at noon on the last day of term, as we will have a great many things to do before the holidays arrive. I expect the two of you to be packed and waiting when I arrive.

I have heard from a few sources that the two of you are not only spending a great deal of time with Gryffindors, but also with a particular boy which I have already expressly forbidden you to spend time with. If I hear any further news of this, I will have to punish you accordingly when you arrive home for the holidays. I would rather that this were unnecessary.

Your father,

Lucius Malfoy

Orion, upon finishing the letter, stood up from the table and stormed from the room. Draco glanced towards Ron, indicated the door once he caught his eyes, and then followed, Vince and Greg in tow. They caught up with Orion halfway to the meeting room.

"Calm down, Ori. We'll figure something out."

"I hate him. I hate his snide assumption that I'll just do anything he tells me. I hate that he's still pretending that nothing's changed. I hate him for wanting to take away everything from me, and I hate looking like him!"

Draco stopped in place, and watched as Orion opened the door and slammed it back against the wall, storming into the room. He took a quick glance at Vince and Greg, who seemed utterly unaware of the meaning behind any of what Orion had said. "You guys wait here for Weasley. I'm going to try to calm him down, okay?"

The two nodded, and took places on either side of the door. Draco closed the door behind him. "Did you *want* to tell the whole school? Because it sure looked like it out there."

Orion swung back to look at Draco. "I just don't want to deal with this anymore. It's too much, Draco. Why can't things just go back to the way they were?"

Draco stepped forward and slung an arm over his brother's shoulders. "So, you don't mind looking like him, then?" he smirked.

A slender eyebrow raised. "I don't know. Why would I want to look like an ugly git like that?" he returned.

Draco snorted. "You may not have the Malfoy fine bone structure, but at least father was kind enough to give you the gorgeous hair and eyes…"

Orion sobered at this. "I want to find a picture, Draco. I don't even really know what my folks looked like."

But before Draco could respond, the door opened, and Ron was there, followed closely by Neville and Hermione. Vince and Greg followed after, closing the door behind them.

"What happened, mate?" Ron asked.

"Father," Draco responded. "He found out that both of us are now spending time with you, and threatened punishment if we didn't stop."

Orion sneered at this. "I don't care." He turned to Hermione. "Granger, did you come across anything about the Potters in your research?"

She looked puzzled for a moment, then her eyes got big. "Um, well, there were a few books…" she said.

"Any pictures of them?" She nodded. "I want you to show me."

He moved to the door, not waiting on the others, and started off back down the hallway. The Library was empty, as everyone was still at breakfast, and Hermione quickly moved to a shelf on the far side of the room, ran her fingers across the spines of several books before pulling one down and handing it to him, opening it as she did to a full-page picture of the Potters.

And there they were. The caption at the bottom of the page read "James and Lily Potter, with their son, Harry, shortly before the attack on Godric's Hollow." The man in the picture had short, messy black hair that stuck up in the back, and square-framed glasses. His arm was draped around the woman, who was quite pretty. She had red hair and astonishingly green eyes in a heart-shaped face. And her arms were around…him. He looked like a mix of both of them. James's hair, and Lily's very green eyes. He was smiling. He strained his memory, trying to recall that moment, searching for some recollection of his mother holding him this way, could almost feel her arms around him. The frustration of not even remembering these two people who had given their lives for him filled him. He felt so detached looking at this picture of his family, his *real* family, that it took him several minutes to realize that Draco had his hand on his shoulder and was trying to get his attention.

"Ori, we've got to get to class." Orion looked up at Draco blankly. "Potions?" The others were standing behind him. Neville, Ron and Hermione looking at him worriedly, and Vince and Greg looking bored and distracted.

"You go. I'm not going. I…I want to read this."

"So check it out. Professor Snape will be furious if you skive. And you know he'll tell father."

But this only steeled his resolve. "I'm not going, Draco. As far as he and father are concerned, they can kiss my…"

"Orion!" Draco glared at him a moment before turning to the others. "Go on. I'll talk to him. Hermione and Neville nodded and hurried out, Greg and Vince following close behind, but Ron looked doubtful. "Weasley, if we skive, we might get in trouble, but if you do, what do you think Professor Snape will do to you?"

Ron paled at this, then nodded and ran after the others.

Draco turned back to Orion, and opened his mouth to chastise him, but Orion stopped him. "You go, too, Drake. I need time to think." Draco's eyebrow rose. "I promise I won't get into any further trouble, but I need to know. I need to get beyond the lies he told me—us. They're my parents, Draco. I need to know. Go on, before Snape's tempted to actually take points from Slytherin."

"Fine. But after class, I expect a long talk, all right?" Orion could tell Draco was worried, but right now all he could think about was the book in his hands. He nodded, then watched as Draco turned and left the room. He stood there for a few more minutes, lost in thought before shaking off his lethargy and approaching Madam Pince.

"Excuse me, but are there any other books about the Potters in the library?" She looked at him before leading him to another shelf, and another, each time handing him a book, until he had quite a stack. He stopped her at ten books, and she helped him check them out, then he returned to the meeting room and began to read.

It was well past lunch when someone finally entered the meeting room. But it wasn't Draco. Standing in the doorway was Professor Snape. And, as usual when he was looking at Orion, he did not look happy. "Where have you been, boy? I was about ready to owl your father. I don't think he'll be pleased to know that you felt it was more important to relax than to attend your classes." Orion glared up at him as he strode across the room and picked up one of the books at the boy's side. He caught the title, and looked at the boy appraisingly.

Orion tried to wait. But he wanted to finally know exactly what it was that his Head of House knew, and soon found himself on his feet, gazing up at the man. "I'd say that it's at least as important as some of my studies, *sir*. Wouldn't you? Knowing who I am?"

Those glittering eyes narrowed, and a sneer spread across Snape's face. "Catching up on your clippings? Wouldn't your father be proud?"

"And exactly which father would that be, *sir*?The one you're friends with? Or the one you probably helped kill?"

Snape's eyes grew round, and all the colour drained from his face. "Watch your tongue, boy. You know nothing about me!"

"I know enough. I know you've been in Lucius's pocket since you were a first-year. And that you probably knew who I was, but you said *nothing*!"

"Listen to me, you insufferable brat," Snape hissed at him. I had no idea who you were until Lucius felt the need to finally inform me in September. If I had my choice, you would be as far from my house as possible. And if I'd known before then, I would have made sure you spent far less time in my godson's company!"

"You would have? And why would Lucius allow you to have any say in his son's life? You're just a bitter old creep! So, what, you found out who I was, and decided that the boy you knew all his life was someone else's son, and suddenly everything you knew about him was untrue? That I must have been pretending all my life? Where the hell do you get off?"

Snape's face was violet now. He grabbed for Orion's shoulder, but Orion moved quickly back. "Don't you touch me! I trusted you! I trusted him! And look where it got me! How *dare* you?"

"Calm yourself boy. Because if I have to do it for you, you will not be pleased with the results." Snape was breathing heavily, but he was looking more worried than angry now, and somehow most of the anger seemed to have drained from him.

"No!" At this shout, a vase on one of the tables imploded, and water began to trickle across the table and drip onto the floor.

"Orion. You have to stop this." Snape's voice was suddenly utterly calm, but this only enraged Orion further.

"Damn you! What do you know? You have no idea what I'm dealing with!"

"I'd say I have some idea, boy, considering I knew your parents. And let me tell you, boy, when it came to your father, you missed nothing."

"Don't say that!" Another vase shattered. "You don't know! They were good people!"

"Don't fool yourself, boy. They were Gryffindors. Deluded to the last. Even when it came to choosing their friends, and who to trust. At least Lucius knows how to deal with secrets…"

"Shut. Up!" Orion shrieked. A wind blew up around him, and the books began to be tossed about. "Give me one good reason I should listen to you? From the moment you found out who I was, you've been treating me like the Gryffindors. I might as well just have conceded to the Hat and become one of them. Would you have treated me any differently?"

Snape stood rigidly in place. "You must stop this, Orion. I cannot speak to you when you are apt to tear the school apart with the slightest whim." His usually pale face had gone to a near-white parchment colour. "You must calm yourself." He took a deep breath, and Orion realized that it cost him a great deal to speak his next words. "If you can calm yourself, I will…try to explain."

Orion could feel himself trembling, trying to hold onto his powers. It was always when he was angry that they got out of control like this, but they'd never been quite this bad before. He closed his eyes and counted down from ten, and when he realized that had not helped, tried again in Latin. When he got to "Unis," he could feel that the buzz of magical energies had faded, and opened his eyes to focus on Snape once more. "I'm calm, sir. What, exactly are you going to 'explain?'"

He waved at the couch Orion had vacated upon his entrance. "Sit." Orion glared at him, but Snape ignored him and settled across from him on the other couch. "Sit, boy. I'm not starting until you are seated. Unless, of course, you're not interested in what I have to say?"

Orion glared at the man for a moment, then resettled on his couch.

"I knew both of your fathers in school, boy. Let me be the first to tell you that you are incredibly lucky that Lucius chose to take you in. I am well aware of the other possibilities of people who might have raised you, and believe me, none of them were pleasant." He frowned at this, but Orion could see he was not frowning at him, but rather at a memory. "Lucius took me under his wing when I had no other friends in this school, and believe me when I say that I would not be the man I am today if he had not." He smirked at this, and Orion was sure there was a joke there he had missed, but he kept silent. "However, your true father, James Potter, and his friends as well, spent a great deal of their time making my life miserable. Especially once Lucius completed his schooling here. Five years of being Potter and Black's punching bag…let me tell you that it left me a bit less than fond of them."

"Black?"

Suddenly Snape recalled himself, and looked at Orion in shock. "No one of importance…A bully who believed that he was admirable, and that causing me pain or embarrassment was his lot in life."

"And he was my father's friend?"

"Forget him, boy. He's less than nothing now, and he is beside the point I was trying to make. When I discovered who you were, it…took

me by surprise. I am afraid I was unable to get past my dislike of your father and his friends. And I took it out on you. I am actually quite amazed that you did nothing about it. I was expecting a visit from Lucius any time now."

Orion was startled at this. Snape…apologizing? Snape never admitted he was wrong. "Draco wanted to write to father, but I had hoped that…you were never unkind before, sir. And I could only hope that if I continued to do well in your class that you would see me in a better light once more."

"You have more to you than I was willing to admit. Rather, I did not want to admit you did…being raised by Lucius has done you some good." He looked at the boy in front of him, then suddenly nodded. "Mister Malfoy, I will not again make the mistake of comparing you to another."

Orion looked calculatingly at his professor. "Even if that other is my father? And I retake his name?"

Snape looked thunderstruck. "Why on Earth would you do such an imbecilic thing? It would do nothing less than place a target on your back, boy. I would have thought that living most of your life with Slytherins would have given you a better sense of self-preservation than that."

Orion smirked. "Let's just say that I've discovered lately that I have a few Gryffindor tendencies I never knew about, sir."

AnnieT – Glad you like it. In my book, Neville is one of the most misunderstood HP characters, so I just had to give him a bigger role. :) He does, and that should be even more obvious in this chapter. :D

Sheree – Dumbledore has always been manipulative. I think the difference between canon Dumbledore and Lucius is that Dumbledore does it cause he has to, while Lucius does it because he wants to. He cares about the people he's manipulating, and he does his best to protect them as much as possible. Doesn't make what he

does right, but it's an explanation, at least. You don't think that Orion has a right to be upset when all his life he's been told that the Potters where idiots and deserved their fate, when all the time, Lucius was training him to be more powerful even than Dumbledore or Voldemort? It's got to hurt when you find out someone's been lying to you like that.

Akuma-sama - :D I had that planned all along. I really wanted to have the troll scene, but having so many kids out wandering the halls together seemed a bit ungainly, so I decided to split them up. And therefore give them a reason to possibly trust Snape more, seeing how he's not able to hex Harry's broom in this one… ;)

Kateri1 – Glad you liked it.

Keep reading, folks.

/18

Gaining Focus

When Orion returned to the dorms that evening after talking with Snape, he felt much better. It was good to know that it was nothing he'd done that had upset his Head of House. And now that they'd talked, he seemed a bit less severe. Perhaps things would improve now. Draco had asked how things had gone that day, but Orion had brushed him off. He wasn't quite ready to talk about it yet.

So, instead he decided it was time to sit down and write a letter to Lucius. Perhaps writing everything out would help him explain things to Lucius. Orion did love him, after all, and this way maybe Lucius would begin to understand as well. He didn't want a war with Lucius, but he wasn't going to let him run his life.

Father –

I call you that because you are my father. As much as James Potter was. You raised me. Showed me how to control my powers, how to uphold family honour, how to be a proper Malfoy. But I will never fully be your son. Because my destiny lies elsewhere. And you knew that, didn't you? I am not a Malfoy. I am someone else entirely. And though I will continue to be your son, I cannot simply choose to ignore the fact that I am, in truth, someone else's child. I will love you and Draco and mother as my family forever, and I thank you for giving me that family.

But I will not allow you to control my life. I was obviously spared the Dark Lord's curse for a reason. And so I need to explore what exactly that means to me. That means that I need to explore my own path, up to and including making my own friends. I will not allow you to tell me who I can be friends with. Ron Weasley and I have become quite good friends, and I will not stop spending time with him simply because you wish me to.

Draco and I are quite enjoying classes, particularly Potions and Charms. We have even set up a bit of a study group, and have each been helping out the others with our best subjects.

I do have a question for you, if you will answer it. You led Draco and me to think that Hogwarts was backwards when it came to the Dark Arts, but you mentioned nothing about the incompetence of the professor who would be teaching it. What, exactly do you know about Professor Quirrell? He just seems such a waste of time. I would almost rather do this class in independent study if this is all we will ever be getting in this class.

Draco and I are looking forward to returning to the Manor for Christmas. How is mother doing? We receive our weekly package from her, but she rarely sends a message with it. It will be good to see her again.

Your son,

Orion Malfoy

He read through the letter several times, correcting it and rewriting it before finally folding it up and standing up to take it to the owlry for Saiph to take to the Manor. But before he left, Draco appeared in the doorway. "Ori, could you…" he saw the letter in Orion's hand and stopped. "Is…is that to father?" Orion nodded. "What does it say? You're not going to anger him further, are you?"

"Don't worry about it, Draco. It was time. It needed to be said."

"Orion…"

"No. I was calm. I didn't accuse him of anything. I just want him to know that he can't force me to abandon my new friends simply because he doesn't approve."

"Let me read it at least? I know you're angry with him. Maybe you said something you shouldn't have?"

"No, Draco. It's going just as I wrote it. He needs to know that I won't put up with him controlling my life. I love him too, but I'm not going to let him do that." He looked at his brother and frowned. "You shouldn't either, Draco."

"He's only going to be angrier because of this, Ori. You know it. He won't accept this. He'll find ways to punish you. And me, probably."

"Yes, but how will he really be able to stop us from doing whatever we want when we return? You know that mother and the Headmaster won't allow him to withdraw us from Hogwarts, and I think even Professor Snape would try to stop him now."

Draco blinked. "Professor Snape? But he's been after you ever since the second week of term."

Orion smiled. "He was a bit put out to find out that I was actually the son of someone who made his life hell when he was a student here."

Draco's eyes grew wide. "Really?" He stood, and Orion could see Draco was trying to process this. Finally Draco looked at him again. "So he does know?"

Orion nodded. "Father told him."

"So what now? Is he going to stop treating you like one of the Gryffindors?"

Orion smiled. "I guess we'll find out come Monday, hm?"

Draco nodded. "You going up to the owlry?"

"Yes. Just wanted to send this up before bedtime."

"Mind if I come with you?"

"Not really. We don't spend much alone time together anymore, do we?"

Draco shook his head as the two walked through their common room. "I miss that, you know? School has changed so much for us."

"Not everything. You're still my brother, Drake."

Draco smiled, but sobered quickly. They had reached the stairs up to the main hall before he spoke again. "Am I though? I mean, with everything you know now, how can you say that?"

"Because you are. Whatever else father did, he gave me something I wouldn't have had without him, Drake. A family. You, and father and mother. I wouldn't give that up for the world. I'll always be thankful for that."

Draco smiled. "Me, too. I can't imagine being an only child." Draco thought about this for a moment, then smirked. "God, I would have been horrible." The two boys chuckled and continued on up to the tower, and Draco waited as Orion sent Saiph off with the letter. "I hope you haven't made things worse, Ori…" Draco said with a slight frown as he watched her fly away.

"Don't worry about it, Draco. It had to happen sooner or later. It was time. If he punishes us, we can deal with it. Besides, what could he do, really? It's not going to change anything."

Draco looked at his brother dubiously. "If you say so, Ori. But it doesn't stop me from worrying."

"Come on. Let's see if anyone is up for a game of Exploding Snap." Draco nodded, and they returned to their common room.

The next two weeks passed surprisingly quickly. There was no response from Lucius, and though Orion continued to tell Draco not to worry, he became increasingly concerned himself. Classes were gearing up to their exams, and most were now quite time-consuming. Draco and Orion, along with their friends spent all their free time together revising for the tests, each helping the others with a particular subject. Draco covered Potions with everyone, Neville helped everyone with Herbology, Ron had gotten surprisingly good at Transfigurations, Orion covered Charms, and Hermione (who had joined their little study sessions despite Draco's protestations that they were fine without her) ran everyone through their History of Magic notes. Even Vince and Greg joined in, though their help was more likely to involve making sure everyone knew when their little sessions would be, and picking up food from the kitchens so that they could miss meals if needed.

The teachers were spending more time on review now and less on new material, so there were days that Orion felt barely dragged past, while others flew by in a flash. Snape's attitude towards him had

improved, though, which was nice. He was still inclined more to call on Draco than Orion, but he no longer picked on him by pointing out minor flaws in his potions. Quirrell's classes, on the other hand, seemed to be getting worse. There were some days Orion could barely keep his eyes open in class, the man was so dull.

During one particularly horrible class, Orion found himself almost hypnotized by Quirrell's prolonged stutter. There was just something wrong with the man. Why was he so afraid of everything? Why did seeing even a first-year in the halls sometimes send him into oral conniptions of monumental proportions? How exactly was the man supposed to teach the darkest subject in the school when he could barely even say the words? And how in the world were they supposed to learn anything?

The next time he and Draco met with the Gryffindors for one of their study sessions, he brought this up. Ron scoffed. "Oh, come on, Orion. I doubt Dumbledore would allow someone into a teaching position if they weren't at least slightly competent."

"I don't know, Ron," Hermione responded thoughtfully. "Orion's got a point. And we know he's up to something. Or he knows something about whatever stone that beast is guarding." She turned to Neville. "Have you gotten anything out of Hagrid about that creature, Neville?"

Neville shook his head. "I've barely managed to keep up with our homework. Never mind visiting with Hagrid."

Draco frowned. "Maybe what we should be doing is watching Quirrell. Remember when you had that headache in his class, Orion? Maybe that meant something. I mean, we all know where that scar came from…maybe it's a kind of danger detector? Maybe he's not who he appears to be?"

Hermione's mouth twisted in a grimace at this, obviously less than pleased to be agreeing with Draco that Quirrell was some kind of threat. "I don't know, Malfoy. That seems a bit much. I mean, maybe Ron's right." Ron snorted at this. Hermione rolled her eyes, but continued. "Why would Dumbledore hire someone unless he believed they were competent?"

"For your information, Granger, and you too, Weasley, Dumbledore does not know everything. Maybe Quirrell was competent when he was hired. Maybe he tricked Dumbledore somehow. Maybe he's simply playing the fool. People aren't always what they appear. You Gryffindors take everything at face value. You need to start looking beneath the surface."

Ron growled at Draco, but Hermione quickly interjected before he could respond. "Look, I can see why you might not trust him. I don't know that I do, either. But that doesn't mean that he's not innocent. Or that Snape doesn't have something to do with whatever's being guarded. Maybe we should all take turns watching them when we have time. See where they go after class, if they ever meet up, if either of them go up to the third-floor corridor, that kind of thing."

Orion nodded. "Definitely, Hermione. But what about over Christmas? I mean, Draco and I will be going home. Are any of you staying here over the Holiday? Because it seems to me that might be the perfect time to investigate. They might even try to get in to take whatever stone this is, too, seeing as the castle will be almost completely empty."

"Well, gran's picking me up in Hogsmeade last day of term," Neville said.

"I'm going home, too," Hermione said.

Vince and Greg nodded that they were going home as well. But it turned out Ron wasn't.

"My folks are going off to Romania to visit Charlie there. It's his first Christmas away from home, and mum didn't want him to feel left out, so they're going off with Ginny. The rest of us will be staying here," he said gloomily.

"Would you be willing to keep an eye out for them over the break, Weasley? I mean, I know that sneaking about isn't exactly your strong suit, but maybe you could keep from tripping over your own two feet this time?" Draco grinned.

"Look who's talking! With that hair of yours, you stand out a mile!" Ron snorted.

But Orion had had enough. "Cut it out, you two." He turned to the others. "So, it's agreed? We all keep an eye out for the two of them? See if we notice anything unusual in their behaviour, or if they go near the third floor?"

They all nodded, then pulled out their books for the evening's studying.

Orion continued to watch Quirrell, but noticed nothing further about him. Honestly, the man was the most uninteresting coward in existence, really. What was wrong with him, anyway? None of the others noticed anything unusual either. Maybe if they were lucky, Ron would discover something interesting over the holidays. Orion hoped so. All these mysteries were beginning to worry him. Something was going on, and he wanted to know what it was.

And then suddenly it was the last day of classes. Exams were over, and Orion found himself more worried about Lucius's response to the letter he had sent than anything else. He and Draco were packed and on the steps waiting for Lucius exactly when he had told them to be there. Vince and Greg had decided to wait with them. Ron had offered to wait with them as well, but though Orion was ready to defend their friendship to Lucius, he wasn't quite ready to risk his new friend in quite that way yet. Writing the words was one thing. Flaunting it in Lucius's face was something else. And he certainly wasn't ready for the drama that would cause.

So the four boys waited for Lucius's carriage to arrive, and watched as handfuls of students came and went from the front doors. Most would be going home the next day on the Hogwarts Express, but a few were being picked up by their parents, and the four watched as parents and children greeted each other happily for the first time since seeing them off on the Hogwarts Express in September. Parents and children hugged each other and chatted eagerly together about what had happened to them in the last three months.

Orion and Draco looked at each other, quite aware of what the other was thinking: "Father will never greet us that way…" In fact, both of

them were quite sure that Lucius would be far from pleased when he saw them. Orion sighed and looked towards the doors again, just in time to see Lucius make his grand entrance.

Lucius looked regal as ever, dressed in a sable-lined cloak with silver fastenings. His boots were polished to a high shine, as was the head of his cane. His silver hair had been pulled back into a queue, and he wore a hat trimmed in the same fur as his cloak. He moved as though there were no one in his path, and several students had to scramble to get out of his way.

Lucius approached his sons with a slight sneer on his face, though this was obviously more for the audience than it was directed at the two boys. Stopping directly in front of them, he looked down at them, scowling slightly. "I see you are ready to leave, at least. There are still some orders of mine you follow?"

Draco flushed and looked at the floor, but Orion held his ground. "Hello, father. It's good to see you again. We have missed you."

There was a near-smile on Lucius's face. "Really, Orion? I would have thought that you were glad to be out from under my thumb." His eyes glinted as he spoke.

Before Orion could respond, a voice spoke from just behind him. "Lucius. What a pleasure to see you again. Pity you don't visit your sons more frequently. It has been so long since we've had one of our little discussions." Snape rounded the staircase and came to stand beside and slightly in front of the four boys. Not quite hostile, but certainly not unthreatening.

Lucius's eyes narrowed, and his nostrils flared in irritation. "Severus. It is…good to see you as well." Then he smiled coldly at Snape. "Pity we cannot stay and visit, but Narcissa is waiting for us at the Manor. You know how she is when she hasn't seen the boys for a while."

Snape's lips quirked up in a smile equally as cold as Lucius's. "Indeed. Wouldn't want to keep your *darling* wife waiting, would we?"

Lucius scowled. "Indeed." He turned back to the boys. "Well? Come along, then." At this, he turned on his heel and strode towards the

door. The two looked gratefully up at their Head of House, who nodded to them, then they picked up their trunks and hurried after their father. At least they could look forward to seeing their mother when they arrived home. But it would be a long ride to Wiltshire.

HarrySlytherinson – Here you go.

DrFraud – Glad you like it so far. Hope I continue to live up to your expectations. :)

Risi – Well, the end of this chapter should give you some idea of what the boys can expect from Lucius. Narcissa knows. But as I've been following the boys, I haven't had a chance to show her reaction yet, so the next chapter could be quite interesting. :)

Harrylissaluv – Glad you're enjoying it.

Kateri1 – Thank you.

19
Christmas

The ride home was silent and awkward. Draco would say something to Lucius, who would glare down at him, answer him curtly, then return to his perusal of the countryside. If the boys tried to talk with each other, they would soon become aware of Lucius's heated gaze, which became more pronounced until their whispers quieted once more. Their trunks were on the back of the carriage, so there was no chance to retrieve books to keep them occupied, and eventually the two boys lapsed into quiet, moody contemplation of what awaited them upon their arrival at home.

However, before the two boys became too deeply lost in thought, Lucius suddenly became talkative. "I hope you both excelled at your exams. I wouldn't want either of you to miss out on this year's gathering…"

Orion's eyes narrowed. Threats. Was this all he was good at? How had he never noticed before? Draco, sensing Orion's anger, quickly intervened. "We did quite well, father. We even started a study group, with each of us working on separate topics, so that everything was covered. I'm sure we got top marks."

"I hope so. Malfoys never do less than the best."

Orion glared up at him, but remained stonily silent. He wouldn't let the man get to him.

After this, Lucius seemed set on telling the boys precisely how well he had done when he had been in school. His had been the top marks each year, and of course the Gryffindors stayed out of his way from day one, the teachers had all admired him, and even Headmaster Dippet (much better than that bumbling fool you boys have) had gone out of his way to make Lucius happy. None of this was new at all to the boys. Lucius was fond of recounting his days in Hogwarts, but never before had they seemed more like tall tales to Orion. Before the stories had been of a place he'd never seen. When he'd heard the stories before, they had been of a place that was magical, and new, and ever so exciting, where he and Draco would

become the rulers of a whole group of boys, and torment the other houses endlessly.

But now, the stories took on a different quality. Hogwarts castle, while still largely unexplored, was at least a known quantity, and was beginning to feel almost as much like home as Malfoy Manor did. Also, Orion had noticed how much more interesting it was to make friends from other houses, instead of tormenting them. Perhaps this was simply a lesson Lucius had never learned? And, too, Orion knew the teachers now, and could not imagine McGonagall treating Lucius any differently than she did any other Slytherin student, which was with disinterest at best, and derision at worst. And Flitwick never seemed to have any particular favourites…Not even in his own house. It simply did not follow that Lucius's stories were anywhere near true. Perhaps Narcissa might know if Lucius were stretching the truth just a bit.

Orion turned his gaze from the man, but soon heard Lucius's irate tones calling his attention back into the carriage. Orion looked at him blankly after turning his gaze back to him. Lucius glowered and repeated his question. "Do you feel you are doing as well as Draco, Orion?"

He glared up at the man. "I think I'm holding my own."

Lucius sneered. "Even with that bumbling fool insisting that you spend so much time with students from the other houses? I am sure that is where the ridiculous idea of spending time with…Gryffindors came from, after all. I hardly think you would have willingly done so without his interference."

Orion put on his most innocent look. "Oh, I don't know, Lucius. I might have gone and sought them out once I figured out how badly I'd been lied to over the years. It's something that might have made me rethink my whole sorting, don't you think?"

Lucius's jaw clenched. Then his eyes narrowed. "I see. Well, of course, I can see how you might see things that way. Never mind the fact that your precious headmaster probably would have abandoned you to the mercy of my former colleagues had I not taken you with me." His snarling voice grew in volume as he ranted at Orion. "Never

mind that he never bothered to try to find you in all these years. Never mind that I gave you more than your parents ever possibly could have…"

"Father!" Draco quickly interrupted this tirade.

Lucius's glare shifted to his other son. But this time his voice was quiet. Not soft, but deadly. "I see. So the do-gooder has infected you as well, Draco? Well, we'll see to that when we return home." With that, Lucius returned his gaze to the passing countryside as though they had not spoken at all. Draco looked at Orion, but Orion simply shook his head and looked away. The rest of the trip passed in utter silence.

When the carriage finally pulled up near the front steps of the manor, both boys were nearly in a stupor. Lucius's descent from the carriage awoke the boys from their lethargic state, and the two hurried to follow their father into the manor.

Lucius stood in the front hall and watched as the two boys entered the foyer. The expression on his face was grim, and the boys steeled themselves for his scorn, which was sure to come, when Narcissa whisked down upon them.

"Boys! I'm so glad you're home!" She pulled each of them into a hug, then looked down at them. "Look how you've grown. By the time you come home this summer, you'll both be taller than I am." She was smiling broadly at them. I've missed you both. The house elves have prepared all your favourites for dinner tonight, and I want to hear all about school before bed, all right?" The boys grinned and nodded at her, Orion especially with a great deal of relief. He had been dreading coming home and discovering that she no longer cared for him since he was not her son. But obviously this was not the case.

Lucius coughed, and Narcissa turned to look at her husband coldly. "Was there something you wanted, Lucius?" she said in her chilliest voice, the one she used to put the wives of Lucius's friends in their places.

"I was trying to speak with the boys before you interrupted, Narcissa. Perhaps you could coddle them later?"

"That is odd, Lucius. I heard no speaking when I arrived. I think the boys are tired, and you can chastise them later for any imagined grievance you might hold. Now they need to go upstairs and get changed for supper." She turned to the boys. "Go on. Scoot. Dinner is at seven, and I want to see you out of these filthy robes by then." The boys, seeing their chance at freedom, scurried up the stairs and towards their rooms.

Once the boys had completely disappeared, Narcissa turned back to her husband. "I won't let you do this, Lucius. You've hurt Orion enough. And I'm sure Draco is fairing little better. You know how they are. They may not truly be twins, but they have always felt a particular affinity to each other." She took a step towards him. "Orion may not be my biological son, but you gave him to me, Lucius, and I will *not* let you hurt him."

Lucius glared down at his wife. When had this all gotten so out of his control? He had to find a way to regain it, or things would get steadily worse. "Of course he is your son, Narcissa. But that does not mean he should be allowed to get away with things. He disobeyed a direct request, and that cannot go unpunished. Both of the boys will be punished, in fact. I will not have my sons hanging around with that…riffraff."

Narcissa's eyes narrowed. "Simply because you and Arthur Weasley do not get along, does not mean that your sons cannot, or should not. If I have to contact the Weasleys myself, I will make sure that the boys stay friends with the Weasley boy for as long as they wish." With that, she turned on her heel and ascended the stairs once more.

Lucius scowled after his wife, then swept off to his study. He might not have control tonight, but come tomorrow, those boys would understand. Whatever it took. He *would* have control back.

Dinner that night was a quiet affair. Lucius was frostily silent, and though this did not keep Narcissa and the boys from talking, the conversation was light and stilted. After dinner, the boys returned to Draco's room. Orion was pleased that Narcissa seemed to still see him as her son, but that had been in front of Lucius. He was

concerned how she would react to him when they were alone together.

Narcissa swept into Draco's room with a tray of hot cocoa and biscuits, then settled beside the two boys. She looked them over carefully now that they were alone. She had always tried desperately not to favour one over the other, but even so, she had always been especially fond of Orion, due to the little fiction Lucius had concocted of Orion's time in the hospital. Orion's closed expression hurt her, and the only thing she could think to do was open her arms to him. He fell into them with a sob, and she rocked him for a moment, waiting for the sobs to subside.

Draco smiled up at his mother. "I think that Ori thought you wouldn't like him if you knew who he was, mother."

"What a ridiculous notion. You boys have always been my pride and joy, and finding out things about you that I didn't know simply means that I have that much more to share with you." She looked down at the boy collapsed against her. "Orion. Look at me." Aquamarine eyes met silvery ones. "You are my son. In fact, I'm grateful to Lily Potter for the very fact that you were born. I couldn't have found a better son if I had tried." She glanced sideways at Draco, and continued, "Well, aside from my little dragon, of course."

Draco smiled at her, and she looked back at Orion and continued. "What your father has done is upsetting, yes, but don't let it destroy your connection to us, Orion. You are a part of this family, and your birth does not change that. We love you."

Orion smiled sheepishly and wiped his eyes. "God, I feel so stupid. Crying like a baby."

"No matter what your father says, showing emotion will not kill you. You are allowed an emotional outburst every now and then. Now, sit next to your brother and drink your cocoa. I want to hear all about school."

The boys talked with Narcissa until late, then Narcissa walked Orion back to his room, kissed him on the cheek and watched him disappear into his room. She scowled once the door had closed.

Lucius was a fool. Keeping a secret like this. It was no surprise the boy had flung himself in the opposite direction. At least the Weasleys weren't particularly powerful. The boy would probably be led easily by Orion, and if she had heard right tonight, by Draco as well. At least the boys seemed to have no trouble rising to the top at school, even if they were spending too much time with Gryffindors.

Narcissa moved towards her own room, lost in thought. Now if she could just convince Lucius to calm down, things might turn out better than he had hoped. But then when had the man ever listened to her?

The next morning, the two boys found themselves standing in Lucius's study. They had been woken by house elves that had escorted them silently to the room, and now found themselves waiting for their father to appear.

Both boys were nervous, and Draco shifted from foot to foot. Orion had already hissed at him to stop three times, but Draco had gone into a bit of overdrive. He hated getting between Orion and Lucius, but ever since Orion had discovered their father's deception, that seemed to have become his place. Perhaps they should have simply stayed at Hogwarts for Christmas this year.

By the time Lucius finally entered, Draco was on the verge of breaking down. He felt that he would do just about anything not to be standing there any longer. Lucius moved to the other side of his desk, entirely ignoring both boys, pulled out a sheet of parchment and began to write.

The boys stood there for several more minutes, Orion growing angrier by the second as Draco worried about the explosion that loomed. Finally Lucius folded the parchment he had been writing on and stood up, then looked down at his sons.

"I believe you are both aware of how disappointed I am at your behaviour in the past few months. I have raised you to understand that you are the pinnacle of wizarding society, but you felt that you needed to degrade yourselves by spending time with less—worthy—students. Since you seem to have such an affinity with those who are beneath you, I have decided that you will be spending the greater part of the Holidays helping out the groundskeeper. You will be his

lackeys, and you will find out just how your little friends spend much of their time at home. Perhaps this will show you just why they are beneath you."

He moved around the desk, and handed Draco the letter he had written. "Draco, give this to Mister Floris. It explains to him exactly what I expect him to have the two of you help with. You will get up each morning, and spend all your time until noon helping him tend the gardens."

Draco looked at his father, wide-eyed. "The gardens? In winter?"

"Do you have a problem with that, Draco?" Lucius sneered. "Perhaps you should have thought of that before you defied me. Now get out of here. Floris is expecting you." With that he returned to his chair, and proceeded to write another letter.

The two boys hurried from the room, then looked at each other once they reached the stairs. Draco looked disgusted, but Orion simply felt resigned. It could have been much worse, after all. "The gardens," Draco moaned. "We're going to get frostbite! I'll need to take showers for the rest of the day to get rid of the dirt!"

"Oh, quit moaning, Draco. We both know it could have been much worse. At least we're only required to help him in the mornings. And it's not going to be so much different from Herbology. We might even learn a few things. Surprise Neville and Professor Sprout when we get back to Hogwarts."

Draco snorted. "Yes, because I live to impress Professor Sprout." But he didn't make any further comment as they made their way out to the greenhouses, where Mister Floris was probably tending the summer blossoms that Narcissa expected for her tables each morning.

The man was affable enough when the boys arrived, and spent much of the morning delivering flowers to the kitchens, where the house elves would then transfer them into vases and place them about the manor. Draco whined once when he was stabbed by a particularly sharp thorn in one batch of roses, but the morning went by so fast that they were surprised when Floris dismissed them fifteen minutes

before noon. "Good job, boys. See you in the morning," he said, grinning, then turned back to the violet narcissi he was pruning.

The boys hurried up to their rooms to shower and change, then down to the dining room, where Lucius and Narcissa were already eating. They settled into their places, avoiding their father's eyes, and dug into their food, grateful not to have to talk.

Narcissa whisked them off to Diagon Alley after lunch, and the boys spent a great deal of time picking out presents for their friends, including a dictionary of plants for Neville, a journal for Hermione, and new chess case for Ron. Narcissa then swept them off to help her choose the decorations for the Christmas party they would be holding. This year, the tradition seemed kind of hollow to Orion. None of his true friends, aside from Vince and Greg, would be allowed to come. After all, all the rest were Gryffindors. It would be unheard of to host them at Malfoy Manor. But he still found himself thinking longingly of Ron, having the run of the castle, getting into snowball fights with his brothers…he sighed, and let Narcissa pull his attention back to the three different colours of tablecloth they had to choose from.

The week went by quickly, and soon it was time for the Christmas Gala. Draco had been quite pleased that they were being allowed to attend the usual gala, despite the fact that Lucius still seemed upset with them and had yet to rescind his punishment of the boys.

As they had every year before entering Hogwarts, Draco and Orion would host the children of their parents' friends while Lucius and Narcissa partied with the older guests. This year, most of those would be their classmates from Slytherin house. They had all grown up together, but actually being in school together seemed to lend a different feeling to the occasion. There were still a few younger children who would not attend Hogwarts for a few years, but they could be safely ignored. It was their classmates Orion was worried about. Draco got along better with their housemates than he did, so he would have little problem enjoying himself, but Orion was sure that he would have a tougher time of it. He just wished that the party was already over.

They had received new robes from their mother that afternoon, and were expected to wear them, so as to insure that the Malfoy reputation was upheld as always. The robes this year were silver velvet with a hem of black at the bottom, and both were trimmed in an evergreen piping. However, the velvet, aside from being luxurious, was also quite warm, and Orion was sure that he would be desperate to take the robe off long before the evening was over. The children all stayed over that night so that their parents wouldn't have to deal with them until they were ready to retrieve them and return home the next day, which meant that the children were sent to bed by midnight, while the adults partied well into the dawn. And from five, when the gala started, to midnight, was a long time, as far as Orion was concerned.

Five o'clock came quickly. Too quickly for Orion's taste. But perhaps that meant that the evening would go quickly as well. The boys hurried down to the front hall, where Narcissa fussed over them for a few minutes before the first guests began to arrive. This was something Lucius insisted on: greeting all their guests as a family, no matter what. Orion had always hated this, but there was simply no way of getting out of it, so he just made sure that Draco took the lead in these things. And Draco had never led him wrong yet.

The first to arrive were the Parkinsons. Pansy's mother was good friends with Narcissa, so they were almost always the very first to arrive, so that Dahlia and Narcissa would be able to spend that much more of their time cutting up the other womens' outfits. Pansy nodded to the boys, then tossed her cloak at the hovering house-elf, allowed Lucius to kiss her hand, then headed for the lounge to wait for Tracy and Daphne to arrive.

The Crabbes and Goyles arrived together, having used the Crabbe ancestral carriage for the journey. The carriage itself was only brought out a few times a year, as it was quite ancient, and well on its way to falling apart entirely. The one time the boys had ridden in it, Orion had been sure the thing was about to shake apart around them. Crabbe and Goyle senior took their places behind Lucius, and Vince and Greg did the same for Draco and Orion. Orion immediately began to feel better, just from knowing they were there.

After that, guests began to arrive in twos and threes. Sometimes alone, and sometimes in concert with other families, sharing the ride or having met on the way. Soon the Notts were there, and Theo quickly began gathering his little group together. He glared at the brothers several times, but Draco told Orion to "Just ignore the git." Dinner was announced at six, and the adults filed into the large dining room, while their children made their way to the smaller dining room down the hall.

The meal was an eight-course meal that Narcissa had been working to perfect throughout the year. Each year she tried to outdo herself, making sure that she had at least one course that challenged all conventions, and made people eager to come back for more next year.

This year the meal began with a simple salad of wild greens in a light apple-thyme vinaigrette. After, there followed: poached salmon in white wine with grapefruit and orange slices, followed by a tart lemon basil sorbet. This was followed by a soup served in bowls made from the shells of streelers, which still retained the colour-changing abilities the creatures were so famous for. The soup itself was a red pepper and roast tomato bisque, but each bowl had been garnished with its own edible exotic flower.

The vegetable course came next. Each person was presented with a baby artichoke, and three different dipping sauces: a lemon-garlic sauce, a creamy dill sauce, and a spicy pepper sauce. There was also grilled fennel, and a platter of asparagus with hollandaise sauce. After that, the main dish was served. Narcissa had bought several prime lamb roasts, which had been coated in a mint, lemon, rock-salt, pepper and breadcrumb mixture, then roasted all day, so that it was pink and tender. The roasts had been served on a platter of roasted greens and potatoes, which had been seasoned with lemon zest, thyme, oregano, rosemary, salt and pepper. After this, plates of fruit and cheese were served, and finally, pudding.

Narcissa always made sure there was enough plum pudding to go around, and unlike most puddings, hers contained galleons and semi-precious stones, which the girls who attended put in their trousseaus, and the women reserved for wearing until the next Malfoy Christmas

Gala. However, the pudding was nothing next to the Christmas cake. In this, too, Narcissa always made sure to outdo herself. This year, she had hired an artist to recreate Hogwarts in cake form. Right down to the lake, and even a tentacle sticking out.

The meal took nearly two hours to complete, and then the children were herded into the hall across from their dining room, which had been decorated in green and silver. There was an immense tree in one corner, draped in silver baubles and glittering fairies, with green sashes slung around it, and a sparkling star set on top. Underneath were presents for each and every guest, and the boys took great pleasure in directing Vince and Greg in passing them out. Everyone was receiving cloaks this year. For the girls, they were evergreen velvet trimmed in ermine with matching caps, and for the boys, they were black trimmed in silver chinchilla.

After this, the entertainers were brought in. Lucius had hired tumblers, along with a storyteller for the younger children. There were also games: magical chairs, which started out with one chair for each person playing, and the chairs would disappear at random intervals, until the only one left sitting was the winner; a scavenger hunt, though the teams were not allowed to leave the hall; blindfold tag; and even an ice sculpture contest back in the dining hall once the remaining food had been cleared away.

The older teens also began passing each other cloved oranges, at which the boys wrinkled their noses. Kissing girls just because they'd given you an orange? Just gross.

The twins had Vince and Greg on their team for the scavenger hunt, and made sure that they held all the things they found for the list. They managed to win, but only by one item, which made the win that much better. After that, they sat and listened as the storyteller told "The Night Before Christmas," then went across the hall to see what kinds of sculptures people had managed this year. The teens were allowed to use magic to animate their sculptures, and so theirs were often the best, but even so, it was always interesting to see what people had made.

This year there was a unicorn; a Quidditch field, complete with balls and two opposing teams; a cobra that coiled and uncoiled, and a miniature Christmas tree. Draco favoured the Quidditch pitch, but Orion was quite fond of the cobra. He could almost hear it hissing to him.

As they walked back across the hall, they were startled by two familiar voices, raised in anger. They tiptoed to the end of the hall and discovered their father accosting their Head of House.

"I believe, Severus, that I told you to keep a watch over them," Lucius was saying.

"Forgive me for not understanding, Lucius, that 'keeping an eye on' meant telling them what to think! The boys are fine as they are, Lucius, and the more you try to interfere in what they think, the further they will slip from your grasp."

"Well, 'old friend,' let me tell you something. If either of my sons spends any more time with that red-headed menace, I will hold you personally responsible. Do you understand?" Lucius hissed.

Snape's face twisted in a grimace. "And I tell you, Lucius, one final time, then I refuse to say it again, there is nothing I can do to stop the boys from seeing each other. Be glad they're just being friendly. Weasley does have a daughter, after all. If you are very unlucky, one of the boys might become…interested in her. Or the mudblood. So if I were you, I would be careful."

At the word "mudblood," Draco found himself having to restrain Orion from attacking Snape, and so he pulled his brother back to the hall before they could hear anything else. Once back in the room, Draco berated him. "Calm down. I know you don't like the word, but what do you expect him to say to father?"

Orion growled and pulled his arm from Draco's grip. "My mother was a 'mudblood,' Draco," he said under his breath, so that only Draco was able to hear. "I can't hear that word anymore without thinking about her. Or even Hermione. What makes Hermione so different from us, really? She's just as good as we are in Potions, despite the

way Snape treats all the Gryffindors. The only difference is who her parents are. How does that make her less than us?"

Draco shushed him, as his voice had been growing louder as he spoke. "Orion, I agree. But remember what father is like. He's hardly going to allow Professor Snape to suggest she's our equal. It's all right. The holidays will be over before you know it, and you won't have to deal with father's attitudes about it again for a while, okay?"

"If he lets us go back, you mean."

"Of course he will. Mother and Professor Snape will insist. And you know that Dumbledore will come looking for us if we don't return."

Orion sighed. "I suppose." The two wandered over to the storyteller, who was now telling the story of how the Mages Mary and Joseph had been stranded without their wands near Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, because they had had them taken away by Roman soldiers. At least this meant that the night was almost over. Once this story was over, Father Christmas would appear and begin to hand out gifts.

When the story was finished, the lights dimmed, and then, with a flash of smoke, a man with a long grey beard and a long velvet green robe trimmed in grey fur appeared. The younger children rushed forward, big grins on their faces, clamouring for gifts. Father Christmas worked his way through the room, passing out a handful of gifts to each child in attendance.

Draco received a new writing set; inkbottles, quills, stationary and a blotter, all with the Malfoy crest engraved upon them; and a new outfit for him to wear to Christmas dinner. Orion received a book on Malfoy history, which he glared at, before turning to his other gift, which was a complementary outfit to the one Draco had received. After this, nannies came around to gather the younger children, and the older children were escorted to guest rooms by house-elves. Vince and Greg waved goodnight to Orion and Draco as they parted at the top of the staircase to head towards their rooms. It had been a long night. Orion tossed his new book in a corner, but placed his new outfit on the dresser so that it would be easily accessible the evening after next.

The next day was Christmas Eve. The adults had not gone to sleep until well after dawn, so most of the children spent their time eating from the buffet set up in the large dining room, then went out into the snow. There was a snowball fight with the children split into two teams, which dwindled as the day went on, and by dinner, there were none left but Vince and Greg, so the four boys went inside to talk before the boys' parents came to take them home.

Vince was quiet, but Greg kept going on about the broom his father had promised him. He wasn't getting the Nimbus, he said, but his father had promised a top-of-the-line model, so he was hoping for better than a Comet. Finally Vince had had enough. "Whatever, Greg. Get over it." He turned to Orion, and spoke, his voice low. "Are you really Harry Potter?"

There was no way to disguise the surprise on the brothers' faces. Finally Draco responded. "What makes you ask that, Vince?"

He rolled his eyes. "Well, you guys never say it straight out, but you kind of imply it. Particularly when you're talking with the Gryffindors." He turned back to Orion. "So, are you?"

Orion and Draco looked at each other for a moment. Finally Draco nodded, and Orion turned back to look Vince in the eye. "Yeah. But you can't tell anyone, okay? It's very important that no one find out, got it?"

Vince nodded, but Greg just looked at them, wide-eyed. "You're Harry Potter?"

"Shush, Greg!" Draco hissed. "Didn't you hear him? Yeah, he is. But we don't want just anyone knowing, okay? You have to keep your mouth shut. And if you can't, then we'll have to make sure you can't, got it?"

Greg, still wide-eyed, nodded, gulping.

Draco nodded once, then turned back to Vince. "Good. So we understand each other then. And if we hear anything about Harry Potter at Hogwarts, we know who to look for, don't we?" his eyes

were narrowed, and both boys were quick to assure their friend that they would tell no one.

After that, talk took a lighter turn, and soon both their friends' parents were ready to go, and the Malfoys watched as their friends rode away. Supper was a quiet affair. After all the guests of the night before, they were all quite pleased to have peace for the evening.

After supper, the boys were allowed to open one present each. The presents they received were wooden boxes that were intricately carved. Draco's was covered in the rippling scales of a carved but moving dragon, and Orion's showed a hunting scene of the hunter Orion roving over the top of the box, hunting a zoo of unusual mythical beasts, his faithful dog Sirius running beside him. Inside the boxes were crystal spheres which, when the box lids were fully opened, hovered above the box, and projected the stars of their constellations into the air. The boys played at combining the two constellations for over an hour before their parents sent them off to bed.

The next morning, Orion woke to Draco bouncing on his bed. "Get up, already, sleepy! It's Christmas. And you know mother. She'll insist we eat breakfast before we even go into the hall to open our presents. Come on! I want to see what we got this year."

Orion rubbed at his eyes, but grinned. "All right already, Drake. He pulled his robe on, and the two boys hurried down to the informal dining hall. Narcissa and Lucius were there already, and for the first time since their arrival home, Lucius was smiling.

"I was beginning to wonder if we were even going to see the two of you this morning." The boys grinned as one, then settled into their seats and began to dig into the food in front of them.

After breakfast, the boys ran into the hall where the tree was still set up, surrounded by mounds of gifts. Once Narcissa and Lucius appeared behind them, they settled on the couch. The house elves then began to pass out the presents, and the boys wasted no time tearing into their packages. Halfway through opening their presents, the family was interrupted by a house elf who announced "Professor

Snape" had arrived. Snape strode into the room, handed each of the boys a package, then settled onto the couch next to Narcissa.

The adults watched as the boys unwrapped new clothes for the year, including a new cloak each. There were also books for each of them, new potions sets from Snape, and a new Quidditch set each. Once the packages had all been opened, Snape called out to Orion. "The headmaster asked me to give this to you, Orion. I only ask that you use it carefully, all right? If I discover you have been using it for less than appropriate purposes, I will make sure it is taken away until you leave Hogwarts for good."

Narcissa was startled. "Severus, what in the name of Salazar…"

Snape was calm, and continued to look at the boy, who was looking down at the package. "Just something the headmaster asked me to give the boy."

Lucius growled, "And why is that old fool giving my son gifts?"

"It's not exactly a gift, Lucius. More of a return. It belonged to Potter."

Orion's eyes grew wide, and his gaze shot up to meet his Head of House's. "This belonged to my dad?"

Lucius snarled at this, then turned to Snape. "Take it back. You can tell the headmaster that it is not needed. He can keep it and any other gifts he wants to give my son."

"I am afraid, Lucius, that the headmaster insisted. Believe me, if I'd had my way, the boy would be allowed nowhere near it," Snape said with a pained expression. "Go on, boy. Open it."

Orion tore his gaze from Snape, glanced at Draco, who looked at him wide-eyed, then the two boys moved from the couch back to the chair he had been sitting in. Once Orion was settled, he proceeded to pull the paper from the package. Inside lay a pool of silvery material. Draco gasped. "An invisibility cloak? Your father had an invisibility cloak?" Orion could hear the envy plain in Draco's voice.

Lucius cleared his throat. "Hardly surprising. The Potters were known for their meddling ways, they'd need things like that to be able to sneak about properly. Here, boy, let me see it." By this point, he had approached the boys, and stood there, his hand out for the cloak.

Orion looked up at him for a moment. "No."

Lucius's nostrils flared. "What was that?"

Orion stood up, the cloak grasped firmly in his hands, a defiant look on his face. "I said, 'no,' Lucius. It's mine. And you're not touching it."

Lucius's eyes were slits by this point. "How dare you…"

But Narcissa intervened. "Why don't the two of you take all your gifts up to your rooms? And make sure everything's put away. Perhaps get cleaned up for lunch, and put on your new robes? The family should be arriving in a few hours, and you want to be sure you look presentable, don't you?"

The two boys nodded, and a moment later all the gifts floated from the floor and levitated in front of the two boys as they left the room. Once she was sure they were well out of hearing distance, Narcissa turned on her husband. "Do you want him to leave us for good, or do you want him to stay in the family, Lucius? Because you're making a very good attempt to chase him off, if that is what you are trying to accomplish."

Lucius's cheeks coloured. "I did not ask for your opinion, Narcissa…"

"No, but you're going to get it anyway. If you want to retain any hold on the boy, the best way to do so is to be sympathetic. It is only natural for him to be curious about his parents. And the more you withhold the information, the more alternate ways he will find to access it."

"I do not intend to allow him to be used by that fool Dumbledore, for whatever reason he's got hidden up those great purple sleeves of his…"

Snape broke in at this. "Then you would be better served showing the boy why you are the better choice to turn to when things get difficult. You are the one making the boy's life hell at the moment, and don't think he hasn't noticed. Narcissa is right. You are chasing the boy away. But, with the three of us to guide him, you should have no worries. Simply let him find out what Dumbledore is like, and he will come screaming back to you. If you push at him, his father's nature will come to the fore, and he will abandon you. I knew Potter at school, Lucius. The Potters are remarkably stubborn as a rule, and your son has definitely inherited the tendency."

"So, what do you suggest I do? Coddle the boy? Kiss up to him? Allow him to demean both me and this family by his behaviour?"

Narcissa snorted. "As far as I have noticed, the only one whose behaviour is reflecting badly on this family is your own, Lucius. Perhaps you are the one who needs discipline?"

Snape remained silent on this subject, but Lucius could see he was itching to agree with Narcissa. The cocked eyebrow told him so.

"And your suggestion is, Narcissa?" he growled at his wife.

"Rescind the punishment. Allow the boys their freedom for the rest of the holiday. Make no more mention of the Weasley boy. You certainly can't take back the statement that you refuse to let them spend time with the boy, but by no longer mentioning it, you allow them to do what they will without actively going against you."

"And when our sons turn out more like Gryffindors than Slytherins?"

Snape's lips twitched. "That will not happen, Lucius. I can at least guarantee that."

"And when Orion decides to let others know his true identity?"

"What makes you think he hasn't already, Lucius?"

Lucius paled at this. "He hasn't told those damned Gryffindors already, has he?"

"I'm not aware that he has, but that does not mean they are unaware. Miss Granger, in particular, is exceedingly sharp. It would not surprise me to learn that she has figured it out on her own."

"Well," Lucius hissed, "she had better not, or I will make sure to hold you personally responsible, Snape." With that he swept from the room, and brooded in his study for the rest of the morning.

So, one more note: I originally chose the name Orion for Harry in this story because I wanted his name to go well with the other names in the family. This gave me three choices. A flower name, which doesn't work too well for a boy, a Latin name, but that wouldn't have gone well with Draco, or a star name. All of the names we've been given in the Black family are all based on stars or Constellations. Sirius, Bellatrix, Andromeda, and Regulus are all stars or constellations. Even Draco is a constellation. And in looking at the constellations, Orion just stuck out. It fit. And it was directly across from Draco in the sky, so I figured it would be best.

Then I started looking into Orion, and became amazed by how fitting the name is for Harry. Orion's dog, which follows after him in the sky, is Sirius. Also, when I looked up Orion to find its meaning, I discovered that it means "Son of the light." Now this works in two ways, as I can see Lucius seeing it as his claiming Harry, as his name means "Light," but it also seems to suggest his true origin, as well as his fate.

Just a little tidbit of information I had to share.

Thank yous:

Kateri1 – thanks

Xyvortex – glad to hear it.

K – Here you go.

SheWolf7 – If I were given my drothers, I'd rather stay at Hogwarts than go home with Lucius. Too bad the boys don't have that option, hm? Glad you think he's in character. :)

Arsinoe – Thanks. Glad you like it. The problem with Lucius is, he hates having things out of his control, and while Draco's still willing to toe the line, I don't think Orion is anymore. He's also torn, cause he honestly loves Lucius, and thinks of him as his father, but how do you deal with finding out the man you loved that way has been lying to you all your life? It's rather hard to come to terms with. I hope you'll continue to enjoy it. Slytherin seems to be fracturing a bit under Orion's influence. And I've barely skimmed the surface yet.

eQuasarus – Thank you so much for your comments. It's always a thrill to get a long review. When I started the story, there was no way I was going to just rewrite the books. The idea seemed a waste of time if I did that. Besides, having Harry grow up Malfoy is going to change his attitudes in a basic way, and so Dumbledore would have to take a firmer hand at the beginning, which leads to broader changes. I can't see a Slytherin Harry doing the exact same things that the Original did. Besides, every time I go to write one of the classic scenes, I suddenly discover how it's been affected by the changes I've made. Your point about the letters from Hogwarts is a valid one, but we don't know exactly how the names are put there, so it is possible that when Lucius had a birth certificate for "Orion Malfoy" made up, that Orion's name then went into the book. Narcissa now obviously knows. I kind of assume that Lucius told her after the boys left for Hogwarts, or after he got the letter from Orion asking about what the headmaster had told him. Hope you liked her reaction. I'm so glad you like my Dumbledore, because most of the comments I've been getting about him are rather annoyed at him for forcing all this on Orion. I honestly don't know why I did the sorting only from Draco's POV, but it's most likely just that Draco comes better to me than Harry does. Besides which, we've seen Harry's sorting in just about every AU fic that does the sorting, and if I had done it, the conversation with the hat would have been something along the lines of the original, but with the hat suggesting Gryffindor instead of Slytherin. ;) I have had a few reviews saying it doesn't make sense, but not too many, really. I tend to see it this way, though: in the original, Harry keeps hearing about how bad Slytherin is, both that Voldemort was in the house, and that Ron

doesn't like it and Dark Wizards come from it, and also that Draco desperately wants to be one. So by the time he reaches the hat, he's dead set against it. The hat sees this, and teases him with it a bit. Which is not to say that he doesn't have Slytherin tendencies, because he does. But if you read that scene, Harry is the one who brings up Slytherin, not the hat. In this universe, I would imagine the reverse is true. He's been told by Lucius and Severus all his life how brainless and idiotic Gryffindors are, so he probably sat under the hat saying "not Gryffindor, not Gryffindor…" heh. Sigh. The problem is, this is only Orion's first year, and though he's now met all the other students in his year, the only one that really stuck out to him was Ron. And he stuck out in a very different way… ;) And with Ron comes Neville, since Dean and Seamus are best friends, and with Neville comes Hermione. I think I've got more than enough friends for him for now. I do have plans for later, but I really had no idea what I was letting myself in for when I started on this fic. I adore it, and the characters, and the differences in them from the books, but I don't think I have another year in me. Maybe someday I will, though. If I do, I intend to bring in more characters to their little group, particularly once the boys start dating… I've never been particularly impressed by any of the few Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw boys that JK has shown us, so I just left them out. For some reason, though, I am quite fond of Susan Bones, don't ask me why though… I believe I did mention the meetings petering out somewhere, but I can't recall specifically. Hopefully, this chapter gave the "thugs" a bit of personality. I am female, yes. Draco just seems to me the type to protect "his stuff." In this case, that includes Orion. For some reason, Draco just fell into the protector role easily. I'm glad you like my characterizations of both Snape and Draco. They're two of my favorite characters, but Draco comes easier to me than Snape, because I'm a very emotional person, while his only emotion seems to be anger. Orion's spilling of his secret was bound to happen, especially since he's just a kid. And who better to tell than his friends, right? I suppose I might have been a bit hasty with those scenes, but there were ulterior motives behind them… :) When I originally started this, I was thinking up to about third year, because after that, we have Voldemort's return, and your question was what stumped me. I honestly don't know what this Lucius would do. And then I realized it went further back than that. Because why would he set Voldemort loose on his own son in book two? So, I've been rethinking it. If I ever figure it out, I might continue,

but until then, I'll just concentrate on finishing this year. I don't see Orion as being unnaturally powerful, just better trained than Harry was. I do think that Harry has a lot of power in him, otherwise he would never have been able to conjure a patronus in his third year. And I am sure that Lucius, knowing that he "killed" the Dark Lord, would want to train him in those powers as much as he could. So, consider this a Harry who's been using his powers already for years. That's what's actually making the difference. Thank you so much for the review, and I look forward to your reaction to this chapter. :D

Sierra-Falls – Glad you're enjoying it. Only about halfway done.

JeanieBeanie33 – Yes, interesting is one word for him…most of the others don't go too well in a PG13 story. ;)

Kamorie – Glad you're enjoying it. I'm writing the chapters as fast as I can.

Risi – Wow, I'm sorry you missed your birthday present, then. ;) Hope you enjoyed it, tho. Can't wait to hear what you thought of Narcissa's reaction.

L.I.T Wanderer – Glad you are enjoying it. Yes, I realize it's been a while since I started the fic, but there were reasons behind the length of time. At the time I started posting, I was also posting another fic, and it was winding down, so I took a few months off to finish it up, because both stories had Draco in them, and they were very different Dracos, so they were bleeding into each other in my head. I'm now ONLY posting this fic, and I'm working very hard to finish, but I sometimes get hit with problems, like how to deal with the hints from canon, so that the group ends up on the right trail, and still make it believable. It's not as easy as it sounds. I'm also working to expand my chapters a bit. I have a bad habit of cutting myself off too soon, but I'm working on it, and as you can see, this chapter is much longer than my usual. I hope you'll continue to read. :)

20

Of Family and Friends

Christmas dinner for Malfoys was a family dinner by tradition. This also included Severus Snape, as he was Draco's godfather. Orion had once asked why he had no godfather, and had quickly learned never to ask again. Lucius's first reaction had been pure annoyance. "There are some things you're better off not knowing. Now stop pestering me." When Orion had tried again, he had spent the rest of his day in his room. He and Draco had heard Narcissa and Lucius fighting about it another night—how Lucius wanted to choose Orion a new godfather, and how her worthless cousin had been the wrong choice in the first place. Draco and Orion had wondered which cousin was Orion's godfather, but neither of them had been stupid enough to ask.

When the family began to appear at the front doors of the Manor that evening, Draco and Orion were already settled in the sitting room, talking to Snape, who had stayed the afternoon. He had been unwilling to answer more questions about the cloak or James Potter, but he was much more open and friendly than he had been since discovering Orion's true identity at the beginning of the school year.

Great Aunt Ciara was the first to arrive, with Uncle Devlin escorting her. Great Aunt Ciara had been old even when Lucius had been young. The boys could not recall a family gathering without her in attendance. She even managed to cow Lucius much of the time. She had married Grandfather's youngest brother at the age of sixteen, and though she had never had any children, she was the undisputed matriarch of the Malfoy family. No one could tell Aunt Ciara no. But though she was the great power in the Malfoy family, she ruled with a velvet glove, rather than an iron fist. The boys knew that if there was anything they needed help with, she was the one in the family to go to. Lucius might hold the purse strings, but even he would relent if Aunt Ciara told him to.

Aunt Ciara was tiny in stature, with pure silver ringlets, though Lucius often told the boys that he recalled her having hair that was quite dark when Lucius had been young. She dressed archaically, in a robe that

she had custom-made, that looked as though it had been made in the time of Queen Victoria, with silver buttons all up the front, and a bustle in the back. When she swept into the room, surprisingly vigorous for her more than one hundred years, her hazel eyes landed on the boys, and she had soon swooped each of them into a hug, telling them that the three of them would have to have a long talk later. Then she nodded to Snape, and settled into the green chair that was always reserved just for her at family gatherings.

Uncle Devlin, on the other hand, while the oldest male member of the family, was the one with the least power. He had been Aunt Ciara's keeper for many years, ever since his last wife's death in childbirth. Unlike Lucius, he was chubby and square-faced, and often had already drunk too much before coming to any family gathering. Orion winced when he noticed that this was indeed one of those times. Devlin glared about the room, then moved to the bar and poured himself a drink. Orion knew that, aside from dinner, he would barely move from the spot he was now standing in.

Lucius and Narcissa entered shortly after Aunt Ciara's arrival, and greeted her warmly. Lucius nodded to Devlin, then began to speak quietly with Snape, while Ciara and Narcissa gossiped together.

They were soon followed by Corbett and Celeste Jourdain, and their son Keary, who looked nothing like a Malfoy. He had his father's dark auburn hair, which curled into ringlets. His eyes, though, were silver-grey like his mother's. They were just about the only thing that marked him as a Malfoy. He was also the only Malfoy near Orion and Draco's age, though they did their best to ignore him whenever possible. Keary was simply annoying. He either tagged along after them, often when they didn't want anyone around; tried his best to boss them around, which they really didn't appreciate; or he tattled on them, which was worst of all. Whenever they could when forced into close proximity, they always tried to find ways to lose him. And in a house the size of Malfoy Manor, that was usually quite easy.

Unfortunately, they knew that Keary would be joining them next year at Hogwarts, unless his father had his way. Corbett wanted Keary to follow in his footsteps and attend Beauxbatons the way his family had since the French Revolution. Celeste had appealed to Lucius, and he

and Corbett currently had an ongoing dialogue about whether or not it was proper for a Malfoy not to attend Hogwarts. The boys often wondered which side Lucius really came down on, since he had wanted to send Draco and Orion off to Durmstrang, and it had only been Narcissa's insistence that had allowed them to go to Hogwarts.

Aunt Argenta was next, along with Nolan, Lucius's only living cousin, and his wife Sabine, Celeste's parents. Their son Taran soon followed, always the last to arrive.

Argenta sniffed when she saw Devlin at the bar, then purposefully ignored him and made a beeline for Ciara and Narcissa. Sabine, on the other hand, hurried to her daughter's side and began to chat with her about Keary's current tutor, who had just eloped with his latest lover, a girl ten years his junior. Nolan joined in the conversation between Lucius and Corbett about Keary's future schooling.

Taran joined the brothers on their couch when he entered, but the boys were disappointed to see him wave over Keary, and settle the boy next to him on the couch. Taran was twenty, and Orion and Draco quite looked up to him, free of his father's home, and able to do whatever he wished now. The brothers spent as much time with him as he would allow, but were always annoyed when he invited his nephew to join them.

Taran asked about Hogwarts, and whether they were enjoying themselves. They nodded, and proceeded to tell him about the three headed dog, and about the troll, interrupted several times during their narration by Keary, whom they glared at. They were careful to leave out the fact that they had seen Snape near the dog in telling the story, though. Taran was surprised at this. "Dumbledore allowed a beast like that in the school? What on Earth was he thinking? The old loon must be losing his marbles faster than I thought."

He turned to look over at Snape, who was now expounding on the greatness of Hogwarts over any other school. "Perhaps it won't be too long until we have a Slytherin Headmaster back in Hogwarts. It's been more than a century, after all." He turned back to the boys smiling. "One of your great-great grandfathers, in fact. Phineaus Nigellus Black. Not remembered terribly fondly today, but I'm sure he

was an excellent head of the school. I doubt he'd allow any of this nonsense if he were still alive today."

The brothers looked at each other. Snape as headmaster? What would that be like? Draco turned back to Taran. "But McGonagall is Deputy Headmistress. Surely she's next if Dumbledore leaves."

Taran smirked. "Ah, but everyone knows that she's just there because Dumbledore nagged her into it. Given a chance, she'd leave in two shakes of a cat's whiskers," he winked.

Before the brothers could question Taran further, dinner was announced. At least at this, they knew they would be able to escape Keary. Every Christmas, the boys sat on either side of Lucius, who sat at the head of the table, with Great Aunt Ciara at the foot. Narcissa sat to Orion's left side, and Snape at Draco's right, so they were always buffered from their younger cousin by at least one chair.

As the house elves began to serve the Christmas goose and the other dishes, Lucius began to talk to Snape about how the boys were doing in school. Draco rolled his eyes at Orion. They knew that Snape had already talked to Lucius about how well the boys were doing at school, so this was simply Lucius's way of showing off to the rest of the family. Luckily the topic was quickly covered, and the discussion soon turned to politics.

Corbett insisted that the French Minister for Magic was a much better Minister than the English one, and while the boys knew Lucius's opinion of the man was the same, they also knew he would defend him. After all, he practically paid the man more than he made as the Minister simply to make sure that anything Lucius wanted done was assured.

The two men argued back and forth about it for a while before Aunt Ciara put an end to the debate with the statement that both men were morons, but then most men where, so that was nothing new, and that talking about politics in general at dinner lead to nothing but indigestion.

After this, the conversation turned to the latest robe fashions from Paris between Narcissa, Argenta, Sabine and Celeste. Long sleeves

were apparently in this year, but the shoulders were much more drooping than last year's robes had been, and were meant to be worn off the shoulder if at all possible. Sabine complained that the fabrics were much too thin this year, while Celeste suggested that they were simply far too plain. Narcissa agreed with her, and told her how she always made sure to hold onto one or two pieces from the previous year that she had not worn anywhere, just in case the new fashions did not meet with her approval.

"And, of course, I always make sure to be original when attending any public functions. It is always of vital importance not to go with the crowd, after all."

Argenta nodded. "Yes, after all, following the pack is such a plebian thing to do."

When Celeste bemoaned the fact that she could not find a good seamstress who would come to their manor in Kent, Narcissa promised to send her own the next time she needed the services of one.

Soon the pudding was served, and all three of the boys were now squirming in their seats, bored out of their skulls from listening to the conversations the adults were having around them. Keary was excited to get a galleon from the pudding, and the other two glared at him as he gloated. Once the pudding was finished, the family adjourned to the parlor, and gifts were passed out by the house elves.

Aunt Ciara had given each of the boys a puppet theatre that could play one of several famous plays by that great wizard Shakespeare. Uncle Devlin gave them journals that prompted them to answer questions, and would talk with them when they had no one else to speak with about things. Orion already planned to use his to deal with his issues about Lucius. After all, there was only so much he could really tell Ron. Aunt Argenta gave them each everfull sacks of their favourite sweets: Draco's full of ice mice and pepper imps, and Orion's full of chocolate frog cards.

Nolan and Sabine gave them each new poster-books full of the latest roster of the Wimbourne Wasps. The full team photo had been signed by each of the players, and Draco was so thrilled that he actually

jumped up and ran to hug both of them without ever letting go of the book. Corbett and Celeste had bought each boy a magical game that simulated making potions. There was a small cauldron that slowly emptied and filled depending on which of the crystals on the sides were pressed. The point was to fill the cauldron before the magical timer on the bottom went off. Keary showed them how to play, and for once, all three boys seemed to get along quite well, which pleased the adults greatly.

Taran, however, gave the boys the best of all the presents that year. His was the smallest of the packages, and Orion turned it over several times before opening it. Inside was a small silver box, that when opened folded out into a case that was meant to hold not only a broomstick, but also an entire Quidditch set.

The two looked at their cousin grinning. He smirked back. "I expect to see you on the best house team at Hogwarts next year, boys, because I want to have plenty of excuses to see the old place."

They grinned at him and nodded. Now all they needed was the brooms. Despite Orion's misgivings, it had turned out to be a great Christmas.

The rest of the week went well. Lucius rescinded their punishment, though he made it clear that he did not approve of them mixing with "that kind," and that if their marks weren't excellent that their summer holidays would be far from pleasant.

They returned to school New Year's Eve, and after unpacking, Orion pulled out the invisibility cloak and they hurried to their meeting room to see if Ron would be waiting. They had owled him that morning that they would be arriving before nightfall, and they hoped that they would be able to surprise him with Orion's new cloak.

The door had been left open, and the brothers hoped that this meant that Ron was waiting inside, and not that someone else had entered their room. It had become quite the sanctuary for them, and it would have been difficult to find someplace else to meet their friends from Gryffindor. Orion draped the cloak over them, and he and Draco snuck forward to see who was in the room.

Ron was draped across one couch, eating chocolate frogs and reading a book. Neville sat across from him, petting Trevor and looking a touch nervous. The brothers moved forward as silently as they were able, but were so startled when Neville spoke that they almost tripped.

"When did you say they were supposed to be here, Ron? We've been waiting an awfully long time."

Ron rolled his eyes. "Calm down, Neville. You know they're coming via carriage, so it might be a while. If they don't show in an hour, we can play chess together, okay?"

Neville looked a bit alarmed at the prospect of trying to play chess with Ron, but he nodded. "Okay." He scooted backwards on the couch and began to pet his toad again.

Draco leaned towards his brother. "Let's grab Longbottom. I want to hear him squeak."

"Draco," Orion hissed, "that's cruel."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"Well, we could pick up Trevor. 'Float' him around for a bit?"

Draco snickered silently. "Go for it."

The two boys moved carefully so that they were standing right behind Neville's couch. Then Orion carefully reached over the back of the couch, and making sure not to touch Neville, he pulled Trevor out of the other boy's hands. Neville let out a shriek, and Ron looked up from his book, at first simply annoyed, but once he noticed Trevor floating in mid-air, his eyes grew round.

The two brothers were hard-pressed to keep from shrieking with laughter, so, when Neville lunged at Trevor to get him back, when his hand caught at the cloak, pulling it slightly askew, neither of them was able to keep it from revealing Draco's blonde head. At this, Ron growled, and his eyes narrowed. "Figures," he said flatly. He directed

a scowl at Draco, who was gasping with laughter. "Very funny, Malfoy. Let me guess. New toy from your father this year?"

Draco was laughing so hard that he was unable to answer, so Orion pulled the cloak off the rest of the way and handed Trevor back to Neville apologetically, then turned to Ron. "Actually, not really. It's my father's. Snape gave it to me for Christmas. Said that the Headmaster had it. Wanted me to have it."

Ron's eyes grew round again. "This was your father's? You mean James Potter?"

Orion nodded.

Ron stood up and moved towards them without even realizing what he was doing, and reached a hand out to touch the cloak before he managed to stop himself. He looked at Orion. "Can…can I touch it?"

Orion smiled. "Of course, Ron." He held out the cloak, and Ron ran his fingers over the soft, iridescent fabric reverently. Neville was still looking on wide-eyed, so Orion held it out to him once Ron had pulled his hand away from it. "Did you want to touch it, too, Nev?"

Neville looked surprised. He still wasn't quite used to having friends like the Malfoy brothers, and the thought that he would be allowed to touch such a rare thing amazed him. "Are you sure? I wouldn't want to hurt it…"

Orion smiled. "I doubt you could, Neville. After all, if it's survived this long, I'm sure it could survive another touch or two."

Neville grinned shyly, ducked his head, then reached out the hand that wasn't holding Trevor so that he could caress the fabric. "Wow. It's so soft." He grinned up at Orion. "Cool. What are you going to do with it?"

Orion shrugged. "Not really sure, actually. Guess we'll see, huh?"

But Ron's eyes grew round a third time. "We could use it to get past that dog on the third floor!"

By this time, Draco had mostly calmed down, but at this, he snorted. "Right, Weasley. Cause it wouldn't be able to smell us, now, would it?"

"Oh. Well, it was an idea!"

"Whatever. I suppose that means you learned nothing while we were away? No new hints? I knew you were useless, Weasley."

Orion glared at his brother. "Shut up, Draco." He turned to Ron, who still looked annoyed, but was scuffing his feet on the carpet. "Nothing?"

Ron shook his head. "Percy decided to make me his pet project. The only time he left me alone was when I went up to bed."

Draco snorted and threw himself down on the couch Neville had been sitting on. "Ooooh, poor widdle weasel. Can't be trusted to be alone."

"Shut up, Malfoy," Ron growled. "I doubt you had much more luck at Malfoy Manor."

Draco sneered, but didn't deign to answer. The other three boys sat down, and they were all quiet for a moment. Finally Neville managed to gather his courage and stuttered into the silence, "Well…um, Gran d…didn't have time th…this year to bring me back to school, so the h…headmaster sent Hagrid to bring me back." When Neville looked around, he realized that all three boys' eyes were glued to him, and he was unable to continue.

There was silence for several minutes before finally Draco growled, "And? He tried to eat you? You got lost on the way here? What?"

Neville squeaked at this, but finally managed to respond. "W…well…I…I asked him about the dog."

Orion could see Draco was about to explode with impatience, so he intervened. "That's great, Neville! What did he say?"

Neville began to warm to his subject now. "Well, he was rather upset I even knew about him, actually. He called him 'Fluffy.'" The other

boys were horrified at this, but Neville continued before they could interrupt him. "Anyway, he's rather fond of the monster, and said he'd raised him from a puppy. Said that he'd loaned him to Professor Dumbledore for some reason. Was rather cagey about it when I asked. Mentioned something about a guy…I think the name was Nicolas Flannel. After that, he refused to say anything else. Started asking me all sorts of questions about Trevor. I think he was trying to distract me."

Draco looked thoughtful. "So, maybe this 'Fluffy' is guarding something for this Flannel? Maybe it's his stone?" He looked at Orion. "What do you think?"

Orion shrugged. "We can ask Hermione tomorrow. I'm sure she'll have some ideas. For now, let's just relax, okay?"

"We won't figure anything out if we don't think about it, Orion…"

Ron snorted. "Look, Malfoy, that stone's not going anywhere soon, okay? Besides, I'm feeling the need to beat you at chess tonight."

Draco smirked. "Dream on, Weasley."

The rest of the evening was spent with the two boys over the chessboard, Neville and Orion cheering them on.

SheWolf7 – One way or another, Lucius is going to be rather annoying this year. Luckily he's only likely to make one or two more actual appearances in THIS fic at most. If I do year two, he's still got to be annoyed about having Orion "taken" from him…

Sak – Thank you for the review. I'm glad you like the story. It's lots of fun to rewrite the cannon, but it can be quite the headache… :)

Athenakitty – Ah, well, if Lucius hasn't learned yet, he's certainly got a surprise coming, doesn't he? ;)

eQusarus – I can see what you mean about Narcissa. She probably would be more manipulative than I've written her. Oh, well. Too late to change it now. Owch. You're right about the dinner. I had so much

fun putting it together, I kind of got lost in the details…As for Christmas in the Magical community, JK never shows them celebrating any other winter holiday. I actually would prefer if she did, but she doesn't, so I'm sticking to that. It is possible the Malfoys celebrate another holiday, but I doubt, no matter what they celebrate, that they give it anything more than lip service anyway. I probably should have mentioned the punishment at least once more, but unfortunately it never occurred to me…As for the House Elves, he wasn't trying to make the boys feel like slaves, just servants. I think even Lucius would still acknowledge that the Weasleys are above House Elves on the food chain…if only barely. It was rather difficult to come up with entertainment that worked for more than a single age group, was winter/Christmas based, and still be able to make it magic. Hope you enjoyed what I came up with. Well, the stuff with Sirius won't be dealt with until at least second, possibly third year (though I do mention him vaguely in this chapter), but I haven't decided, as I'm currently only committing myself to this first year. I'm thinking of having him break out sooner, and I would definitely agree that Orion will know more about him than Harry did. Glad you like the way he got his cloak. I figured that now that they're getting along better, and since he's a frequent visitor to the Manor, it seemed the best way to get it to him. Haven't quite decided when Lucius will discover that Hermione knows, but the way I ship, that may end up being the least of his concerns… :D Sirius Lives! I need a t-shirt that says that. I've pretty much decided that once Sirius escapes, he'll probably hide in the Manor, seeing as it's probably unplottable, and he's got two connections there. I can see Narcissa staring down Lucius about it. :) Great review, believe me. Hope you enjoy the chapter, and the rest of the story, and at least check in from time to time. :)

L.I.T Wanderer – Thank you for the review. Hope you enjoy the chapter.

Sierra-Falls – I'm going to make it to the end of the boys' first year, and from there it will depend on a few things: how much response I get in general, how much interest there is in a second year, if I can come up with a plausible plot, and how much time I have. I have several other long fics that I would like to work on, and I'm hoping that I will be able to work on them for a while. We'll see.

JeanieBeanie33 – He sure did.

Arsinoe – Glad you liked my Narcissa. She's quite different from the one in the TR series.

And to the blank anonymous reviewer – Glad you like the story. Looked up Sirius at the Lexicon, and didn't see a middle name listed there. I think I've seen it in a few fics as his middle name, but I don't think it's canon.

21
Nicholas Flamel

The first week back in class, there was so much to do that the group rather forgot their little search for information on "Flannel." But Hermione soon reminded them of it. After all, if it was research, she was in her element. By the weekend, the group was spending much of its time either in the library or in their meeting room searching through books. It seemed a pointless search, though. How on earth were they supposed to find a reference to a man whose name they weren't even sure of, when they had no idea why he might be in a book in the first place? It didn't stop them from trying, though. They just had to know.

Neville had suggested going back through the books they had read while they were looking for information about stones, and seeing if there were any mentions of "Flannel," so he, Ron and Draco looked through those while Orion and Hermione went looking for other books that might be useful. They brought back several with the help of Vince and Greg, who weren't much help when it came to skimming the books for information, but were more than willing to lug heavy books around.

Unfortunately, between classes and studying, the group simply had no luck finding anything out about the man, whoever he was. And Orion was getting frustrated. He wanted to know what was going on. Since he had learned who he was, secrets had seemed especially grating to him. And he couldn't help but remember the look on Snape's face when he had confronted Quirrell outside Fluffy's guardpost. He had looked so grim. As though everything depended on making sure that no one, least of all Quirrell, got anywhere near that stone.

Orion knew that it was only a matter of time before someone—Quirrell most likely, considering Snape had been so concerned about the man getting into Fluffy's room—tried to go after that stone, whatever it was. But what could they do to stop it? Particularly if they had no idea what they were even looking for.

One night, Orion was simply unable to stop thinking and fall asleep. Finally, the idea came to him that if he wasn't going to be able to sleep, the least he could do was go back to the library and check the restricted section. It was the one place they hadn't really looked yet. And after all, he did have that lovely cloak. None of the teachers would be the wiser, right?

Orion slipped out of bed, pulled on his cloak, and exited the Slytherin dungeons walking cautiously and quietly to the library. He managed not only to avoid Filch and Mrs. Norris, but also Professor McGonagall, who he had seen walking down the main staircase towards the kitchens as he ascended. But once he made it to the library, he was a bit concerned. After all, he had no idea where even to begin. For one, he had never so much as looked at any of the books in the restricted section before, let alone been in there.

So he wandered from shelf to shelf for several minutes before managing to work up the courage to pull out one of the books. The first was useless. Entirely blank, as though someone had stashed an unused journal there. But it was far more likely that it was simply unreadable until one uttered the right words, or passed one's wand across it in the correct way, or was only readable in certain light—perhaps the quarter moon in midsummer, or a full moon. The next book was little better, written in some sort of gibberish, possibly Goblin or Elvish. Orion sighed and moved away from that shelf. It was obviously of no use to him, even if the information was there. None of those books seemed to be willing to give up their information easily.

He moved on to the next shelf and picked up a new book, hoping that this one might at least be written in English. Unfortunately, this was even less help than the first two. The moment he opened it, it let out a shriek that rattled his eardrums. Sure that Filch would be on his way any second, Orion dropped the book and hurried from the room, pulling the cloak tightly around him as he went.

And it was a good thing he did, for Filch was apparently not the only one to hear the book's alarm ring out. Before Orion has even made it to stairs down to the main hall, Snape was there. True, he might have been getting on much better with Orion now, but Orion knew that one step out of line could send things right back to where they were. He

huddled in a nearby alcove as Snape swept past, then hurried in the opposite direction.

No sense in going straight back to the dorms yet. Snape would be checking there momentarily, and would be able to tell if someone had just gone through simply by asking the portraits. They might not see him in his cloak, but they would certainly notice if the door to the common room opened and closed by itself. No, it would be better to lie low for an hour or so, till things died down again, and then return to the dungeons.

So now he just had to find a safe place. Snape might not know that he was the one who had tried to break into the restricted section, but that didn't make the meeting-place safe. He'd probably check there, just to be sure. So where else could he go?

Orion wandered the corridors for a bit, nearly bumping into Snape once more, after which he hurried in the opposite direction, and quickly discovered himself lost. He turned and tried to retrace his steps, but quickly found himself so far from the dungeons that he wondered if he would ever get back. However, just as he was about to start panicking, he stumbled across Professor Snape once again.

This time, though, Snape was not alone. Quirrell was with him. But it did not look as though they were looking for whoever had broken into the restricted section. Snape had Quirrell cornered between a pillar and a suit of armour. He was hissing at the man, and it took several minutes of trying to control his panicked breathing before Orion realized what Snape was saying to Quirrell.

"…Find out you were the one in the restricted section, I will tell Dumbledore. Simply because you are a teacher does not mean that you have basic access to whatever you wish. Be it book, student or stone. You are required to go through the channels just like everyone else."

"Truly, Se…Severus…I d…don't know what you m…mean."

"I know someone was there, and if I can trace it back to you, and be assured I *will* find out, I will make your life a living hell, Quirrell."

Quirrell let out a horrible, cackling nervous laugh that caused Snape to look at him wide-eyed. "I will…k…keep that in m…mind, Severus."

Snape stepped back, and Quirrell hurried away, Snape watching him until he was well out of sight. Then he turned, and watched as he swept past, a sour look on his face. Once he had reached the corner, Orion hurried after him, carefully following him down to the dungeons. When Snape disappeared off to his own rooms, Orion slipped into the common room and hurried up to his dorm, slipping off the cloak only when he reached his own bed once more. His heart was beating madly in his chest, and he was sure that he would never be able to calm down.

He lay in bed, unable to fall asleep as he thought about what had happened. Snape obviously suspected Quirrell of something. He had thought that Qurrell was the one who had tried to break into the restricted section. And since he had mentioned the stone, Orion was sure that Snape believed Quirrell was after it. But what was the stone? What could be so powerful that Quirrell would want it, and Snape would feel the need to guard it? Orion lay lost in thought, and it was a long time before he fell asleep.

The next morning, Orion's late night showed, as he could barely keep his eyes open in class. When Draco tried to coax from him what he'd been up to the night before, he'd promised to tell him that evening when they got together with their friends.

But Draco couldn't leave it at that. "You went out last night, didn't you?" he whispered in their next class.

Orion refused to answer, but Draco continued. "I got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, and you weren't in bed. Did you go to the third floor?"

"Draco, not now!" Orion hissed. He looked around, but everyone was paying attention to Flitwick, and no one seemed to have heard Draco. "I promise I'll tell you everything tonight, okay?"

Draco nodded, but Orion could tell he was disappointed. Once they arrived in the Great Hall, he couldn't restrain himself from trying again. "Come on, you did go out, right?"

Orion glared at his brother. "I told you. I'll tell you tonight. With everyone else. I don't want someone overhearing. Okay?"

Draco sighed, and began to eat. If there was one thing he'd learned over the years, it was that once Orion decided something, there was nothing you could do to convince him to change his mind. But damned if he'd like it. Smacked of secrets, and they didn't keep secrets from each other, did they?

That evening, he was nearly on pins and needles waiting for the Gryffindors to arrive. "Come on, Ori. Just a hint?"

Orion's nose was tucked in their current Potions reading. "No. I only want to explain things once. I'll tell you when Ron and the others get here."

Draco stomped to the opposite couch and glared at his brother. He hated not knowing what was going on. Before they'd come to Hogwarts, they'd never had a single secret from each other. But now, it was Ron this and Neville that. It was like Orion didn't even need him any more.

Before he could interrupt Orion's reading again, the Gryffindors arrived. Ron slumped down on the couch next to Orion, and Draco was particularly annoyed when Orion looked up, greeted him with a smile, and quickly put away his book. Apparently Ron was important enough not to ignore, but Draco was just a distraction. Draco scowled over at them, then at Hermione, who set herself carefully next to Draco, avoiding his eyes. He was tempted to tell her to find another spot, even to call her "mudblood" just to get a reaction out of Orion, but he managed to keep the impulse in check.

"So spill already. They're here. What happened last night?" he growled at his brother. The three Gryffindors looked startled, but quickly turned to look at Orion.

Orion glared at his brother, then sighed. "I decided that we weren't getting anywhere last night, and I couldn't sleep, so I decided to see if I could get into the restricted section."

Hermione looked torn between curiosity at what he had found, and horror that he had been sneaking around the school at night. "Did you find anything?" she asked breathlessly.

"No. Most of what I looked at was useless. Unreadable. And then one of them screamed. So I scarpered. Nearly ran over both Filch and Snape trying to escape."

Draco snorted. All that build-up for that? "That's the big story you couldn't tell me all day?"

Orion raised an eyebrow at his brother. What had gotten into him, anyway? "No. That was just the beginning. When I nearly ran into Snape, I figured I'd better keep out of his way, so I went in the opposite direction, but I got lost. I tried to retrace my steps, but I couldn't figure out where I was at first, until I found Snape threatening Quirrell."

At this, everyone's eyebrows raised. "Snape was threatening Quirrell?" Ron asked. "What was he threatening him about?"

"Well, I think for some reason, he thought that Quirrell was the one who had tried to break into the restricted section. He said something about Quirrell not being able to have access to whatever he wanted. And he mentioned stones."

Draco scoffed and leaned back. "So what? That could have meant anything."

But Hermione wasn't so sure. "I don't know, Malfoy. This is the second time that Snape has confronted him about a stone. He was probably referring to whatever the dog was guarding."

The others nodded, and Draco scowled. "Well, this still doesn't get us any closer to figuring out what that dog is guarding now, does it?"

"Are you just going to throw stones, Malfoy, or did you have something else to contribute?" Ron said as he glared at the other boy.

A smirk spread across Draco's face. "As a matter of fact, Weasley, my brother wasn't the only one to have an epiphany last night."

Ron crossed his arms. "Oh, Malfoy? Do tell."

"Well, I was thinking that maybe we've been looking at this all wrong. We're not sure about the name of this person, or what exactly the dog is guarding for him, but we have to assume he's a friend of Dumbledore, right? After all, why else would Dumbledore guard something valuable for him, placing his students in danger? So if we cross-referenced Dumbledore, and stone, and names sounding like Flannel, maybe we'd have more luck?"

The others were speechless for a moment. Then Hermione grinned. "Draco, you're brilliant!"

Draco leaned back into the couch, smirking. About time someone noticed it. "Of course I am."

The group started looking that night, but it was several days before they made any headway. Between studying and school, there seemed little time. Also, the boys had received several letters from Narcissa asking them about particulars for their coming birthday party in April. Narcissa adored planning parties, and had been working on the details ever since Christmas. They had been sending letters to her daily, requesting this or that treat or entertainment for the party. She'd even promised the boys she'd work on getting Lucius to allow Ron and Neville to come to the party. Ron had told them that she'd even contacted his mother about things. The boys all crossed their fingers. After all, what could be better than having all four of them together at Malfoy Manor?

Orion wasn't too sure about all this, though. He felt a bit odd celebrating his birthday as usual when he knew that his true birthday was several months down the road. He'd looked it up. His birthday was actually in July. The thirty-first, to be exact. He wasn't quite sure what to do about that fact, though. He almost wanted to just forget it, and hadn't been able to work up much excitement for his party, despite everything, so he'd allowed Draco to take over most of the planning, but it still felt quite odd.

It was Hermione who finally discovered the reference they were all looking for. They'd agreed to meet one weekend in late February, and

the brothers had just arrived when Hermione swooped in carrying just about the largest book Orion had ever seen.

"I think I've found something!" she cried as she dumped the book in the centre of their study table. Neville and Ron hurried in after her, and when the twins looked at them in hope of enlightenment, the two shook their heads.

"She wouldn't say anything until we were all together, but she's been bouncing around since late last night," Ron shrugged.

Hermione grinned at them all. "I was reading this book last night, as a distraction from the quiz I knew we'd be having in Transfigurations on Monday, when I came across a mention of someone." She turned to Neville, who looked rather startled at her sudden attention. "Neville, does the name Nicholas Flamel mean anything to you?" she asked, her eyes shining with excitement.

He looked startled for a moment, then gasped. "That's it! That's the name Hagrid said. Nicholas Flamel!"

The other three boys looked at Hermione again, waiting for a further revelation. When none seemed immediately forthcoming, Orion asked, "So? What does that mean?"

Astonishingly, Hermione's grin widened. "Ever heard of the Philosopher's Stone?"

Draco's eyes grew round. "No. It can't be. You must be wrong."

Her expression grew smug, and she bent over the book and began to read. "The ancient study of alchemy is concerned with making the Philosopher's Stone, a legendary substance with astonishing powers. The stone will transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal.

"There have been many reports of the Philosopher's Stone over the centuries, but the only Stone currently in existence belongs to Mr. Nicolas Flamel, the noted alchemist and opera lover. Mr. Flamel, who celebrated his six hundred and sixty-fifth birthday last year, enjoys a quiet life in Devon with his wife, Perenelle (six hundred and fifty-

eight)." She finished reading, and glanced up at the boys, her eyes glowing.

Draco looked at her as though he had never seen her before, but the other three just looked rather confused. "So the stone that the dog is guarding is the Philosopher's Stone?" Orion asked.

Hermione nodded. "Almost definitely. It's very valuable, and obviously someone's after it if they moved it here from Gringotts. Maybe they're only holding it until Flamel can get rid of it?"

Ron choked at this. "Get rid of it? Why on earth would he want to do that?" His eyes grew dreamy. "This stone sounds amazing! Living forever, and all the gold you could ever want… If I had that stone…"

"Yeah, Weasley, we know, you'd be a millionaire, right?" Draco sneered. "Use your brain for once, can't you? Obviously someone wants it for more than wholesome reasons. Dumbledore wouldn't put his whole school at risk simply because a friend is worried about their valuables. The question is, who's after it, and what do they want?"

Cassiopeia Potter – Yep, I know it's Flamel. But I figured that Neville would be unlikely to remember the name, seeing as it's so unusual.

Darkangelgep – Well, I'm sure Lucius will be willing to buy them brooms eventually…maybe for their birthdays? Or, I could have their godfathers each buy them a broom… ;) Glad you like Taran. I'll probably have him at the boys' birthday party, at least…We'll see.

JeanieBeanie33 – Well, I was thinking Draco/Hermione for later… :D

Tori – not in this story, but if I do more of this series, I'm definitely planning on having him in it…possibly even in the next one.

Fangfoot – glad you like it.

Arsinoe – I'm glad you're enjoying it. Had a lot of help from Foodie thinking up the family. That was especially fun. :)

22 Birthday Plans

No answers presented themselves. Though the group spent many days together after that, no more progress was made. Surely Dumbledore had things under control, the Gryffindors argued. But even they could not completely put it out of their mind.

Plans for the birthday party were proceeding apace, and Orion was growing more uncomfortable with the idea. This was not his birthday, after all. He brooded on this for weeks before Draco slipped onto his bed one night to find out what had him so moody. The two often slipped into each others' rooms at home when they were upset or insecure, so they could talk; and Draco was sick of waiting for Orion to come to him. Besides, this was the only time they got to be alone at school any more.

Draco slipped through the curtains and settled himself at the end of the bed. He was silent for several minutes, waiting for Orion to say something, anything, before he gave in to the need to ask.

"Well?" he demanded.

Orion sighed. He rolled onto his back. "Well what?"

Draco growled quietly under his breath. "Well, what has you so unhappy lately?"

Orion scowled. "What makes you think I'm unhappy, Draco?"

Draco snorted. "You mean aside from the fact that you get all quiet every time mother sends an owl, or any time we discuss the plans for the party?" He shifted on the bed, trying to find a more comfortable position. "Are you worried about seeing father again?"

He shook his head. But here was another worry to add to the rest. Lucius. How would he react if Orion insisted upon recognizing his true birthdate? "No, not that…"

"So, what then? You look as though you're preparing for a funeral, not a birthday. And even better, your birthday. What could be wrong with that?"

"Listen to yourself, Draco. Don't you hear what's wrong with that?" Draco looked at him blankly, and Orion huffed in annoyance. "It's *not* my birthday. It's never been my birthday. Remember? I'm not your twin. Or have you conveniently forgotten?"

Draco looked at him bemused. "Of course it's your birthday. It's your birthday as my brother, if nothing else. Who you were before doesn't matter. We've always celebrated every birthday together. I don't see why this one should be any different."

"That's not true, Draco. I lived with my parents for a year and a half before they died. That means we celebrated at least one birthday apart. I have a different birthday from yours. And just thinking of pretending that this is my birthday…It makes me feel ill, Draco. I'm beginning to wonder if I shouldn't let everyone know who I am. I'm getting sick of having this big secret from everyone. I don't want to lie to everyone any more."

Draco was silent for a moment. "You don't want to be with us any more?" he finally said. His voice was only just above a whisper.

Orion sat up at this. "Of course I do, Draco. I love you, and mother, and even Lucius. You're my family. I just…"

But Draco interrupted. "Yes, but if you want to be with us, you have to know that if the Ministry ever found out what father did…" Draco looked lost for a moment, and Orion nodded.

"I know. But it's going to come out sooner or later, Draco."

"But why now, Ori? It's just a birthday. And we'll get presents, and have our friends…Mother's even managed to get permission for Ron and Neville to come. How can that be so hard to deal with?"

"Because I feel like I'm lying, Draco. We all know it's not my birthday. I feel…it just feels wrong."

Draco pursed his lips. "What kind of Slytherin are you, if you can't even lie, Ori?" he smirked.

Orion rolled his eyes. "Very funny. You know it's not just the lie. I've been denied this large part of myself for ten years now. Maybe I just want someone to admit that I have another birthday, you know?"

Draco blinked for a moment, then grinned. "Two birthdays! That's even better! Just think of all the presents. And you know mother, she'll love it! We don't even have to tell everyone why we're celebrating. What do you think?"

Orion laughed. "You know, Draco…only you could make this about getting more presents."

But after that evening, the knot in his chest seemed to loosen. It was still there, but for some reason, it was manageable now. Like there had been a fist around his heart, which had suddenly let go. Certainly there were other things to worry about, but he was finally able to enjoy the preparations for the party without worrying.

And the plans were proceeding well apace. Halfway through March, Narcissa herself arrived at the school, and took the boys to Hogsmeade to get them fitted for robes for their party. Draco's were silver with evergreen trim, and Orion's were emerald with silver trim. After the fitting, she treated the boys to ice-cream sundaes at the Three Broomsticks before returning them to the school.

Both Neville's grandmother and Ron's parents had agreed to allow them to accompany Draco and Orion to the Manor for the weekend, though it had taken a great deal of negotiation on Narcissa's part to get Lucius and Arthur Weasley to agree on this. Most of the other attendees were friends from Slytherin, but they would only be coming for the day of the party. The brothers had promised Neville and Ron a tour of the estate, along with a Quidditch match, two on two, Orion and Neville against Draco and Ron. Neville was nervous about this, as he still wasn't too steady on a broom, but Orion promised that nothing would happen to him, so he agreed.

By the end of March, Narcissa was sending daily owls asking about this detail or that. Menus, decorations, entertainments, all had to be okayed several times by both boys before she was pleased with the plans. She had hired a photographer that Arintia Zabini had

recommended, and there would be tumblers, and the latest musical sensation, not to mention tours of the estate's magical zoo.

The menu had been planned out to the smallest detail. The boys had chosen all their favourite foods. Draco had insisted on a soup the house-elves had created for him one year when he had been ill with wizard-pox, a tomato-fish soup, which was a traditional tomato soup with fish-shaped crackers that swam around the bowl until you caught and ate them. In a fit of generosity, Draco had insisted that Orion choose the main dish, so he had decided on a mild jerk-spiced chicken, which was something that they were only allowed to have rarely, as it was a dish that Lucius was not particularly fond of. Along with this, they would have grilled vegetables, and roast potatoes. There were many letters back and forth to Narcissa to decide just which vegetables to have. Draco had insisted on peppers and mushrooms, while Orion had asked for asparagus and tomatoes. Narcissa also insisted on including eggplant, which both boys made faces about, zucchini, scallions and onions.

Then of course, there would be the cake. The elves had already started the preparation stage for it. Each year, Narcissa insisted on adding another layer to the cake, each boy taking a turn at choosing the next flavour. Again, Draco, in hopes of cheering up his brother, had insisted that Orion choose the flavour for the newest layer. At the top would be an angelfood layer, followed by the newest flavour, german chocolate, then strawberry, which Orion had chosen the year before, vanilla, chocolate, yellow, red velvet, lemon, white chocolate, cherry chip, lemon, and finally pound cake. Each guest would be served whichever layer they wished. Along with this, they had a rainbow custard ice-cream, which became whatever flavour the guest desired.

By the time the boys were to leave for home for the weekend of their birthdays, they were so tired of the details that they had begun to simply allow Narcissa to choose whatever she wished, rather than bother with any more details.

The night before Draco, Orion, Ron and Neville left for Malfoy Manor, they had a small impromptu party with Hermione. She had been upset not to be invited as well, but Orion had assured her it was not

because they did not want her to be there. Even Draco had tried to console her over this.

"Believe me, Granger. You do not want to meet father. He only looks down on Weasley and Longbottom. You, he'd be quite a bit more cruel to. We'd rather not expose you to that."

Hermione looked mollified, but still less than pleased at this. "If you say so, Malfoy…"

The subject had not been brought up again, though she had asked if she could give them their presents before they left for the estate. They had agreed, and Neville, Ron, Vince and Greg had wanted to have a party so that Hermione wouldn't completely miss out. Vince and Greg had gone to the kitchens to get treats, and Neville, Ron and Hermione had managed to decorate the room before the brothers had arrived.

The house-elves had even made a small cake, just big enough for the seven of them. They sat and enjoyed the treats before Hermione finally insisted that the boys open the presents she'd gotten them.

Draco smiled as he opened his present, *A More Complete Guide to Potion Components*,by Pondero Kettle. "Thank you, Granger. I've been trying to convince father I needed this book for ages. He says I should wait until sixth year. That I wouldn't have any use for it yet."

Hermione grinned and turned to Orion, who was turning over the book she had found him to look at the back. *A Concise History of the Potter Family*.It had been written before he was born, so there were no pictures of him with his parents, but there were pictures of his parent's wedding, and even of his father with his parents. He looked up at her, uncertain of what to say.

She looked a bit worried. "Do you like it?"

He broke into a silly grin. "It's brilliant, Hermione!" He reached over and gave her a hug. "It's perfect. Thank you."

She grinned. "I had to look everywhere to find it. Turns out there aren't many copies out there."

"Well, I'm glad you found it. I can't wait to read it."

Draco glanced at it, then up at Orion. "Just be sure father doesn't catch you with it, Ori. He won't be pleased."

Orion scowled. "I don't care. However many times he tries to deny the truth, it's not going to change a thing. So I'll do what I want, whether or not he likes it."

Draco looked worried, but knew better than to push. "If you say so…"

The rest of the party was enjoyable. Draco and Ron played their usual match, and the rest got in on the act by "betting" sweets against who they thought would win. At eight, they said good night, making plans with Neville and Ron to meet them in the hall early the next morning with their overnight bags. The carriage would be arriving to pick them up at eight, so they would need to be prompt. It wouldn't do to upset Lucius any more than necessary.

It was difficult to go to sleep that night. Finally, in a fit of anxiety, Orion settled onto his brother's bed, and they talked through the night. By morning, they were exhausted, but they grabbed the bags they had prepared, and hurried to the front hall, where they found Professor Snape and their mother waiting.

"Mum!" Draco cried. He threw himself at her and gave her a hug. When they separated, Orion followed suit, though not quite as exuberantly.

"I thought father would be picking us up," he said when she released him.

She made a face, and Orion was sure this was Lucius's way of trying to pay Narcissa back for forcing him to invite two Gryffindors to his sons' party. "He had a few other things that he needed to attend to before your arrival. He will be waiting for us when we arrive home."

Draco just grinned. "Well, this is more of a treat, anyway, mother."

She smiled and smoothed down his hair. "So, where are these friends of yours?"

At that moment, there was a clatter from the top of the marble staircase, and Ron and Neville, followed closely by Hermione, came hurrying down the staircase. Snape sneered at them. "I do apologize, Mrs. Malfoy. We do try to teach these children about appearance and punctuality, but there is only so far the headmaster is willing to allow me to go to insure such things."

Narcissa simply smiled. "They seem just fine to me, Severus." She turned to her sons. "Are you going to introduce me?"

Orion smiled and waved his friends forward. "Mother, this is Ronald Weasley." Ron made a face at Orion behind his hand before sticking it out for Narcissa to shake.

"Good to meet you, Mister Weasley. I've heard so much about you."

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Malfoy."

Her eyes flew to Neville, who had stayed near the stairs when Ron had moved forward to greet her. "And I take it this is Mister Longbottom?"

Orion smiled and waved him forward. "Come on, Nev. She doesn't bite. I promise." Neville blushed, but stepped forward. "Mum, this is Neville. Neville, our mother."

"Glad to meet you, ma'am," Neville mumbled.

"How are your parents, Mister Longbottom? Has there been any improvement in their condition?"

Neville looked at his friends, horrified. He had never mentioned his parents to them, and now Orion wondered why. "No, ma'am."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I'm sure someday one of the healers will figure something out to help them." Now she turned to Hermione, as though she and Neville had simply been talking about the weather. "And this is?"

Orion cleared his throat, and hurried to Hermione's side. "This is Hermione Granger, Mother."

"Ah. The, ah…Muggle-born?" she raised her eyebrow at the girl in front of her, who flushed.

Orion was used to this sort of thing from Lucius, but he certainly hadn't expected it from his mother. "She's one of the smartest students in our year, mother."

Narcissa put on a simpering smile. "Isn't that nice?" She turned and made her way towards the doors. "Come along, boys. It's getting late. We don't want to keep your father waiting."

Orion and Draco exchanged glances, then turned to Hermione, who looked absolutely miserable. "Go on," she said, managing a weak smile. "I understand. It's not like you can control your parents' feelings. Have a good birthday, you two." Then, with a glance at Snape, who was glowering at them, she turned and fled back up the steps. All four boys shouldered their bags and hurried out to the carriage.

But now Orion was beginning to have doubts again. Neville looked as though he'd been slapped in the face. And the way she'd treated Hermione… Orion made sure to sit in between Neville and Narcissa, hoping to shield his friend from any further barbs. Certainly, he had seen her act this way towards other adults, particularly Lucius, but he had never expected that she would do so to people he considered friends.

The ride to the manor was both less and more uncomfortable than the one for the Christmas holidays had been. Narcissa chattered on about how the twins must show their friends everything, including the indoor pool, the magical zoo, and the Quidditch pitch. Draco told their mother that they had already planned a match for this afternoon. She smiled at this. "Such generous boys I've raised. I'm sure it will do these two good to be able to play on a national-requirements built pitch. I'm sure neither of them have seen anything quite like that."

Orion scowled at this, and Draco looked taken aback.

Narcissa seemed to take no notice of her sons' reactions and continued on. "I hope you will be loaning them robes for the party

tomorrow. It would not do to have your special guests outshone by your other friends."

Neville seemed unable to speak, but Orion could see that Ron was turning red, and decided to head him off at the pass. "I'm sure that whatever they've brought to wear will be perfect, mother. Besides, they're our friends. It doesn't matter what they're wearing, so long as they're there."

Narcissa smiled blandly, and patted his hand. "Of course, dear, of course."

It was a long ride, and Narcissa managed to find many more subtle and not-so-subtle ways to insult Ron and Neville before the carriage finally pulled into the manor drive. It was with a sigh of relief that the four boys disembarked from the carriage. Lucius was waiting for them at the top of the stairs leading into the house. Draco helped Narcissa down from the carriage, then hurried after his friends. There was no way he was leaving Orion and their friends to deal with Lucius alone.

Lucius was scowling down at the other three boys when Draco approached followed by Narcissa. "Have a nice trip?" he smirked.

Neville automatically nodded, but Ron scowled up at him. Orion was the one who spoke, though. "It was nicer that the one for the Christmas holidays, Lucius. Excuse us, we have to show Ron and Neville where they will be sleeping." With that, he waved his friends into the hall, and after a hurried glance at his parents, Draco followed.

They made their way up the stairs and Orion led them towards the guest wing. The other two boys were looking around with wide eyes. Ron whistled. "Dang. You live like this all the time? How often do you get lost?"

Draco grinned at this. "We don't get lost, Weasley. We've lived here all our lives. We know where everything is. It's hard to get lost when you know a place from birth."

Orion was glowering. "Or something," he added, and Draco looked at him darkly.

He turned back to Ron. "Trust me, Weasley, it's not as complex as it looks. You'll get the hang of it in no time. Once we've got you settled, we'll show you how to get to our rooms, just in case, all right?"

They showed the boys to two separate rooms, with an adjoining bathroom. "See, Neville? Nothing to worry about. You'll be right next to each other," Orion said, trying desperately to reassure his friend. Neville had been quite silent the entire ride, and Orion was beginning to wonder if this hadn't been a bad idea after all.

Neville looked around, still entirely wide-eyed. "Neville?" His friend turned to look at him and smiled vaguely. "Are you okay, Nev?" Orion asked.

Neville nodded, and Orion knew they wouldn't be getting much more out of him for a while. "Well, why don't we show you our rooms, okay?" Neville nodded again, and the four friends left the rooms and moved down the hall towards the upper staircase. "If you guys need us for anything," Orion said, "Don't hesitate to come visit us, okay? I realize this isn't what you're used to, but you're our friends, and we do want you to have a good time, even if our parents are…"

"Jerks? Control freaks? Cuttingly rude?" Draco chimed in. "Ignore them, both of you. They're not worth worrying over, Nev, okay?"

Neville bit his lip, but nodded. "Okay," he managed in a very weak voice.

Orion smiled. Sometimes, Draco could be amazing…when he wanted to, anyway.

Next chapter: the party

Arsinoe – glad you liked it. I'm actually quite enjoying the interplay. I can see why JK kept her group to three, though. It's getting a little confusing keeping track of everyone.

Constance Malfoy – Here you go

Darkangelgep – Ah, well, a few things still to go. After all, they haven't connected it to Voldemort, yet. :) Glad you liked it.

Fangfoot – Glad you liked it. Here's the next one.

/23 The Birthday

Neither Neville nor Ron were able to stop staring at their surroundings. Finally, Orion had had enough, and managed to convince Draco that, no, they did not need to see just one more thing, and they headed to the kitchens for a light lunch before going outside to check out the menagerie and then play Quidditch.

The kitchen itself was rather large, though not as large as the Hogwarts kitchens, and the four boys were plied with sandwiches, biscuits, juice and crisps before being shooed out into the gardens by the elves. They sat in the spring sunshine and gobbled down the lunch as Ron asked the brothers questions about the manor. He wanted to know everything about it: from how long the family had lived there, to how often they got lost when they were on their own, to how many rooms the place had, and how many of them the brothers had never entered themselves.

Draco answered them all gladly, but Orion was less pleased. This was not why he wanted his friends here. He didn't want to impress them with his family's wealth, or intimidate them, as Neville obviously was. He'd hardly spoken a word since they'd first arrived.

"You all right, Nev?" he finally asked after Ron's questions had died down a bit.

Neville nodded, but his eyes were wide and scared. Orion had seen the look often enough at school. He didn't want to see it here.

"What's wrong?"

Neville looked at him blankly for a long time before finally responding. "Wh—who were the couple in the portrait at the top of the first staircase you took us up?"

Draco snorted. "Mother's sister and her husband. She hates her, but she insists it stay there. Don't really know why."

Neville looked at him for a moment, then his face closed off and he looked away. "I think I do. Their names…are they the Lestranges?" he asked tightly.

Orion and Draco glanced at each other, but it was Orion who responded. “Yeah. Why?”

“Because they’re the ones who hurt my parents.”

The three boys stared at Neville, wide-eyed. Finally Ron was the one who was able to ask. “Their Aunt and Uncle hurt your parents, Nev?”

They could see that Neville was debating with himself. This was obviously something he didn’t like to talk about. He swallowed thickly, then looked at the ground. “A few months after You-Know-Who attacked the Potters and disappeared, some of his followers came after my parents. The Lestranges used the Cruciatus on them to try to find out what they knew. They were hoping that my parents knew where he was. The aurors caught them before they could escape, but they’d been at it so long…”

The other three boys looked at each other. They knew about the Cruciatus curse. How it could leave its victims forever mindless, given enough time. Orion and Draco knew that the Lestranges had been in Azkaban since the boys had been quite young, but neither Lucius nor Narcissa had ever explained why.

“Neville, I had no idea,” Orion said, horrified to even be connected to them. Of course, it was little different from growing up in a family associated with Death Eaters when his own family had been lost to Death Eaters himself, but somehow, this felt much worse.

Neville smiled weakly. “It’s not your fault. Either of you,” he said, looking at the two brothers. “I just don’t like to talk about it much. It’s hard enough to deal with without everyone feeling like they have to feel sorry for me all the time.”

Draco, Orion and Ron all looked at each other for a moment, uncertain of what to say. All of the boys were subdued after that, and they finished their lunch quietly.

After they had finished, Orion led the way to the Malfoy Menagerie, where they showed the other two boys a cage of diricawls, which the Muggles called dodo birds, and believed extinct; a glumbumble hive, with the large bees zooming in and out of their home at slow motion,

and a tank with a gang of impish-looking grindlylows that even contained a pair of horse-shaped kelpies. By the time they had reached the tank, Neville seemed to have forgotten his earlier upset.

Ron seemed fascinated by the tank, where they could see the grindlylows rising up every now and then to pull at the kelpie's tails, who would then turn and bite at the little creatures, which were always too fast for the beasts to catch. Neville spent a great deal of time watching the glumbumbles zoom in and out of their hive, fascinated by their slow-moving wings.

Finally, Draco managed to coax them into the next area of the menagerie, where all of the mammals were kept. Ron fell on the floor laughing when one of the ferret-like jarveys called Draco a "mealy-mouthed pillok," and Neville was enthralled by the dog-like crups. "But they're so sweet," he said. "Why does your family keep them in cages?"

Draco snorted. "One bit father once, and he's never forgiven them. He says we're all safer if they just stay in here."

By this point, Ron had moved on to the next cage, and was staring in fascination at the creatures inside. They were furry and black, with long snouts. Their front paws were curiously flat, like spades, and their eyes were bright and shining as they looked out at the boys. "What are these?" Ron asked.

"Ah," Draco grinned. "Those are the Nifflers."

"Nifflers?" Neville asked, curious.

Orion smiled. "They're treasure hunters."

Ron's eyes glowed. "Treasure?"

Orion chuckled. "Yeah, but I don't think your folks would like them much, Ron. They are rather destructive in their search. It'd tear your home to shreds."

Ron grimaced. "Dang. I could definitely use something like that."

“Ah, poor Weasley. Wanted to bring home a little pet to make himself rich. Too bad, hm?” Draco cooed.

“Stop it, Draco,” Orion shot at him. But Ron hadn’t even noticed. He and Neville had moved onto the next cage, which was not so much a cage as a paddock and stalls. There was a silvery white winged horse, and two huge Abraxian horses, but the real attraction was what stood in the centre of the paddock.

“You have a unicorn?” Neville breathed.

Draco grinned. “Yes. He’s been in the family for generations. My triple-great-grandfather saved him from some Muggle hunters who were trying to capture him. There is a family legend that, should he ever die, our family will be lost forever.”

Ron huffed. “Nothing lives forever, Malfoy.”

Draco gazed at him for a moment. “Perhaps you should study up on your magical creatures, Weasley. Unicorns are immortal. They don’t die unless killed. And it’s extremely difficult to kill a unicorn. They are nearly the fastest thing on the planet. Only a dragon could kill one with impunity.” With that, Draco turned and led the others into the final section of the zoo.

The cages here were all of stone, most fairly small, and all containing different serpents. There was a boomslang, which lay curled tightly in a coil at the bottom of its cage, an ashwinder, sitting upon its clutch of glowing eggs, an occamy that flapped its wings and reared up on its legs as they passed, and a large cage filled with three-headed runespoors.

The brothers stopped in front of the cage, and glanced at each other before shooting a look at their two friends. Ron looked at them worryingly. “Well, I suppose you have more than enough of your house represented here…” he said.

Draco grinned. “That’s nothing. Want to see something really interesting?” He turned to Orion. “Show him.” The look on Draco’s face worried both boys, but the look on Orion’s face was worse. They

had never seen their friend look quite so intense. Even the day he had gone crazy trying to find out information about his parents.

“Draco…” he growled under his breath. “You promised.”

Draco snorted. “Please, these two already know so many of your secrets. What’s one more to add to the bunch?”

Orion looked at them uncertainly. “I don’t know that they’d want to know, Draco.”

Ron stuck out his chin, and his eyes flashed. “I can keep a secret. So can Neville. Right, Nev?” he turned to the other boy, who looked worried, but nodded.

“If it’s important, we certainly wouldn’t tell. You’re our friend, Orion.”

But Orion looked doubtful. “Yeah, but you might not want to be when you find out…” He shot a glare at Draco. “All right. Swear it on your house honour. No matter what happens, you won’t ever tell anyone. Not even Hermione. Got it?”

The two boys nodded solemnly, and Orion turned back to the cage, where one of the three-headed snakes had moved forward to examine the boys. Both boys jumped when the hissing began, and when they realized the hissing was not coming from the snake, they both recoiled, eyes wide, as they watched their friend talk to the snake. Finally, Orion turned back to look at them. He’d felt them draw away, and had avoided looking until the snake had told him it was sleepy, and moved away.

Ron’s mouth hung open, and Neville looked ready to bolt. Orion tried to smile, but it came out more of a grimace. After several minutes, Ron managed to find his voice. “You’re a Parselmouth?” he asked in a faint voice.

Orion nodded. Draco was grinning like mad. “Isn’t it cool? We come here all the time to talk to the serpents. We found out one day when father left us in here alone. He asked me why father ignored them all the time, and I asked him what he meant by that, so he asked me if I

didn’t hear them. And then he talked to them. It was the coolest thing I’d ever seen or heard!”

Neville looked at Draco, horrified. “Cool? How can you think it’s cool? Only dark wizards are Parselmouths.” His voice was squeaking as he spoke, and he looked cautiously at Orion, as though he were certain that Orion was now going to attack him.

Orion turned away from them, glowered at Draco, and stormed from the Menagerie. Draco looked at the other two for several minutes before speaking. “So, apparently knowledge of one dark talent makes him evil? I thought you two were his friends. Apparently not. You do know he’s had this ability longer than he’s known you, Longbottom? How does it change the boy you’ve known for the past eight months?” Then, with a sniff, he turned on his heel and raced after Orion. If he was lucky, he could catch him before he got too far. But when he exited the Menagerie, Orion was sitting on the bench, waiting.

He looked up at Draco when he appeared, and sighed. “It’s not fair, Draco. I knew they’d react this way. But it’s not like I can change who I am. It’s just another ability, like anything else. So what if I can talk to snakes? Does that make me evil?”

Draco sat next to his brother, and put an arm around his shoulders. “No, Ori, it doesn’t. Besides, you and I both know that there are really only shades of evil. Father taught us that. It’s not a black or white thing. Some things are dark, yes, but that doesn’t mean they can’t be used for good.”

There was a sniff from the doorway, and the brothers looked up to find Ron and Neville standing there. “What, Weasley? Did you have a comment to make?”

“Shades of evil? You actually believe that? So how, exactly, could you find something good in death?” he asked, red-faced.

Draco raised his chin, an eyebrow quirked. “Well, I don’t know about you, Weasel, but I don’t exactly want to live in a world where everyone who ever existed still lived. Would you?”

“Why not? What’s wrong with the idea of getting to know Merlin, or sitting at the breakfast table with your great-grandparents?”

“Because, Weasel, if everyone who had been born still existed, this planet would get awfully crowded, don’t you think?”

Ron looked angry, but shrugged. “I suppose. But that doesn’t make killing good,” he muttered.

“I didn’t say it did, Weasley. Simply that there are reasons behind everything dark. So, answer me this, Weasley: what makes Parseltongue so evil?”

Ron’s mouth opened, then closed, then opened again, before he was able to think of a response. “Well, everyone knows that all Parselmouths have been evil wizards.”

Draco smirked. “So, what you’re saying is if all evil wizards had red hair, that would mean that everyone with red hair was evil?” He blinked innocently at Ron as the other boy tried to come up with a response.

It was Neville, though, who managed to respond. “But, Draco, that’s not the same at all. Every Parselmouth has been evil, throughout history. There’s never been an account of a good one.”

Draco met his eyes. “Maybe they just never recognized their talent. Or never used it. Or made sure that it didn’t get into the histories. Have you ever thought of that, Longbottom? Just because something is stated as a fact, doesn’t make it true.”

Ron looked at Orion, and he could still see the doubt in the other boy’s eyes. He raised his chin, and glared at him. “This doesn’t make me any different than I was yesterday, Ron. Or the day before. But if you can’t accept it, fine.” He stood up and looked away from his friends. He didn’t need them anyway. He had Draco, and that was enough. “If you don’t want to be my friends anymore, I can understand. I’m sure mother could arrange a carriage back to the school tonight.”

But Ron moved forward quickly and put a hand on his shoulder. “It’s not like that at all, mate. It’s just…”

Then Neville was there, too. “It’s a scary talent, Orion. It was a bit of a shock, that’s all.” Ron nodded.

Orion looked at each of them. “You both still want to be my friends?”

Ron grinned. “Never doubt it for a second, mate.” And even Neville managed a smile at that.

The rest of the afternoon was spent at the Quidditch pitch. They managed three matches, and Orion and Neville managed to win two. Neville turned out to be quite the Keeper, and Draco and Orion took turns snatching the Quaffle from each other, while keeping an eye out for the snitch, which only appeared in the final game. Orion was able to catch the snitch just before Draco reached it, setting the total score of that game far above either of the other two.

Afterwards, the four boys trudged back up to the Manor. It was starting to get dark, and they would all need to shower and change before going down to dinner. Neville was starting to look nervous again, and Orion spent a great deal of time reassuring him that his parents would not be dinner-table discussion fare, that it would, in fact, be far more likely that Lucius and Narcissa would ignore the boys entirely until dinner was over. “They never talk to Vince or Greg when they stay over. I’m sure it will be fine.”

They separated from their friends at the top of the stairs, Neville shooting a look at the picture of the Lestranges before he and Ron hurried off towards the guest wing. Draco and Orion hurried up to their own rooms, showered and changed, and met their friends again at the top of the main staircase.

Lucius and Narcissa had already seated themselves when the boys arrived in the dining room, and aside from greeting their sons when they entered, spent the entire meal in silence. Ron tried to start a conversation at one point, but a pointed glare from Lucius shut him up quickly, and so the boys were silent throughout the rest of the meal. After pudding was served, Lucius excused himself, stating that he would have more than enough sweets the next day, and that he

had business to attend to, so he left the table, soon followed by Narcissa. The boys began to talk quietly after that, but once they had each polished off third helpings of dessert, they decided to move up to Orion's bedroom to talk before settling in for the night.

It was well past one before Neville and Ron returned to their rooms, and Draco stayed for another hour beyond that. By the time he left, Orion was so exhausted, that he'd nearly forgotten the worries of the coming party, and whether or not Ron or Neville would tell anyone about his rather unique talent.

Up until the time Draco had mentioned, Orion had assumed everyone heard snakes speak the way he could. That they just ignored them as inferior, and therefore never answered them. After Draco had discovered his brother's talent, the two had done a great deal of research on it. It was true, there were no known wizards in history who had been known as Parselmouths who had not "gone bad," at least according to history books. But Orion had convinced himself that Draco was right. That History was written by people who did not like the talent, and would therefore not include any good wizards who used it. All the same, Draco had been the only other person who had known. Until now. He could only hope that his friends would keep their promise.

The next morning dawned sunny and bright. Narcissa was so busy with the arrangement of everything on the main floor that she insisted the boys stay upstairs and out of her way until the other guests were due to arrive. The boys spent a quiet morning taking turns playing chess, with Ron and Draco helping Neville and Harry respectively when it wasn't their turn. A house elf brought up a tray of soup and sandwiches for them at noon, and when they were finished eating, each returned to his room to prepare for the party.

When they arrived in the front hall, dressed in their best formal robes, Snape had arrived, along with many of the first and second-year Slytherins. He was kissing Narcissa's hand, and looked up, his brow arched, at the three of them as they scrambled down the last few stairs.

“Gentlemen. I hope,” he said stiffly, looking pointedly at Neville and Ron, “that you have been conducting yourselves well?”

The two boys nodded solemnly. “Yes, sir,” they both said.

The Slytherins were all glowering at them, obviously believing that they had no right to be there, but Vince and Greg soon appeared, and greeted them and the twins warmly, which seemed to mollify many of the other students, who proceeded to make their way into the hall that had been decorated for the party.

When they entered the hall, the boys discovered that the Photographer that Narcissa had hired had already arrived. He was snapping shots of all of the children as they came in, and running around the room trying to get them in different groups, so as to be sure that everyone was caught on film. When he saw the twins entering, he quickly took a shot of them, then hurried to pull them into a corner so that he could get several more shots. They were saved, though, when Taran and Keary appeared, and the photographer hurried to catch their entrance.

The dinner table was already set, as the party would begin with the meal, so Draco and Orion took their places at the table and waited for everyone to seat themselves. Draco took the head of the table, and Orion the foot, with Vince and Greg sitting to either side of Draco, while Ron and Neville took the seats on either side of Orion. Orion smiled as he watched Taran take a seat at the centre of the table, knowing that Keary would sit across from him, and therefore be unable to badger either of them during the meal. Taran caught his eye and winked, and Orions’s smile spread into a grin.

Once everyone had settled into a seat, the elves produced the first course, and talk gave way to eating. There was a group playing hit songs from the Wizarding Wireless, which had been the compromise between getting the Weird Sisters to come, which had been what the twins had wanted, and the Quartet that Lucius had wanted to hire.

The music continued throughout the meal, and Orion frequently found himself glancing up to meet Draco’s eyes. Draco seemed to be enjoying himself. He even seemed to be getting along with Zabini, who had sat next to Vince, okay. But he seemed rather annoyed that

he couldn't easily speak to Orion. Orion smiled and shrugged, digging into his chicken with gusto.

When the final plates of food disappeared, jugglers entertained the group for a bit while they digested, then people began to leave the table in search of the other provided entertainments. Lucius had hired the Kestrel's second-string players to play a match against any students who wished to try, and the game was surprisingly exciting, despite the students being far overmatched. Afterwards, most of the guests were led through the Menagerie, so Draco and Orion, followed by Ron, Neville, Vince and Greg, who had all seen the Menagerie before, back to the Manor.

They were walking past the sitting room to the hall when they overheard Lucius growling at Snape again. Draco motioned the others to be silent, and the group stilled in the hallway, the twins creeping closer to hear what their father and Head of House were discussing.

"I don't care whether or not you can do anything about it, Severus. I want them away from her. She is a bad influence…"

"She is the best student in their year, Lucius. If anything, their grades have gone up because of her."

"She is a mudblood, and I will not have my sons consorting with her!" Lucius was pacing in front of the fireplace, while Snape sat stiffly in a chair nearby, a half-full brandy-snifter in his hand.

"I cannot do more than I have done already, Lucius. The only way you can keep them apart is to withdraw them from the school, and Narcissa and Dumbledore would never allow it."

"It does not mean that I have to like or accept it, Snape. You will do something to help me. Or I swear that your little secret will become public knowledge," Lucius spat.

Snape sneered at this. "And what makes you think it's not, Lucius? I did stand trial, after all. And were you to come forward with what you know, you would be painted with the same brush. You have just as much to lose as I do. I would suggest you not try to threaten me when

you stand in the same boat. It wouldn't precisely be healthy for you, and could very well be even more detrimental to you than to myself. After all, you don't have the most powerful wizard alive on your side, do you?"

Lucius hissed at this, and threw the glass he was holding into the fire. "Do not presume to lecture me, Severus. I have known you since you were a boy, and I know more about you than that bumbling fool thinks he knows. I could make him age a decade were I to spill all your secrets to him…"

Draco and Orion looked at each other in shock. Were they talking about being Death Eaters? Or did Lucius know something even worse about their Head of House?

Snape's eyes were narrowed now. "If you would just calm yourself, Lucius…"

Lucius's teeth were set in a grimace. "How can I be calm when my sons are being led down the garden path by that fool! I will not have it!"

"You will not be able to change anything if you cannot control your temper, Lucius."

Lucius took a deep breath, turned to Snape, and growled, "Then what, exactly, do you suggest?"

The boys leaned forward, and watched as their Head of House took out his wand, waved it…and slammed the door in their faces. Had he known they were listening? They leaned forward and pressed their ears to the door, but could hear nothing. Snape had obviously cast a silencing charm on the door as well. Annoyed, they led their friends back to the hall, and proceeded to throw things at the floating green and silver bubbles that decorated the ceiling, until the other guests began returning from the Menagerie.

When everyone had returned, and settled themselves back in their chairs, the cake and ice cream were served. Draco insisted on having a large slice of lemon, which he devoured with his ice cream, which had become a pale green pistachio flavoured treat the moment he

had dipped his spoon in. Orion had chosen two layers, and therefore had a thin slice each of strawberry and German chocolate, along with simple vanilla ice cream. Neville had watched the brothers order their dessert in wide-eyed silence, but Ron, Vince and Greg had all chimed in with their choices and were already halfway finished with their platefuls before Neville made up his mind to have a slice of cherry chip with some cherry ice cream.

“Is your birthday cake always this immense?” he asked Orion as he began to eat his portion.

Orion shrugged. “It gets a bit larger every year. I don’t know what mother will do when it gets too big for the room, though.”

The guests chatted about the Quidditch game, and the amazing creatures they had seen in the Menagerie as they ate. A particular favourite was the unicorn, and Taran was quick to mention the legend about it, how it had been caught, and what it might mean if the unicorn were ever to die, which had many of the guests enthralled.

After they had finished the cake, the twins were settled into chairs on the other side of the hall, and the guests gathered around to watch as they opened the presents. There were several books, more clothing, along with joke shop tricks enough to last them through the rest of the year, and enough sweets to last until next Christmas. The highlight of the presents was Taran’s present to Draco: a large poster of the Wasps, which had been signed by all the players, and included season tickets for the next year, which Taran said the manager of the team had donated himself.

By the time everything was opened, the coaches to take them all back to school had arrived. Keary looked longingly at them as they all ascended into the coaches, and Orion couldn’t help but feel a bit sorry for him. Narcissa kissed Draco and Orion each on the cheek, and Lucius told them to behave, then the boys took their bags from the house elves and descended the steps, claiming the front coach, along with Vince and Greg. The six spent the trip talking over their weekend. It had been surprisingly uneventful, and they all looked forward to telling Hermione everything they could remember.

Crystal Cat-chan – yes, the thought is quite a nice one, isn't it? But he won't be blonde forever. Not sure how long he'll keep the hair, really. And he still looks like Harry, just with blonde hair, and slightly bluer eyes. Glad you like.

Darkangelgep – She's a bit of a bitch, isn't she? Here's the Party.

Sak – I'm glad you appreciate my Draco. I do think he'd be very different from the Draco we know, but I also think there would be some of that spoiled brat left. Glad to see it's showing through. Thank you for your comments on the next part of this saga. I'm mostly looking to see if there is interest. I like the idea, and it will probably eventually get done, though almost definitely not before the next book comes out.

Beth5572 – Glad you like it. Here's the next bit.

Arsinoe – Thanks. She's so different from the Narcissa in the TR saga, it's weird. I've been having a lot of fun with her. I'm glad you think it works well.

Hermione88220 – Glad you like it. Hope you liked the party. Norbert's on his way. ;)

Bahzad – Glad you like.

Fangfoot – Thanks. Here's the next.

Pimpilidimpi – Glad you're enjoying it. Lucius is currently at war with everyone else. I think the real problem will start next year. Voldemort is far away, and not active, so there's not much conflict of interest yet. His views haven't changed, though, and had Voldemort returned before Harry and Co went back to school, I'm not sure what would have happened. As it is, Orion and Draco are starting to see that some of the rubbish they've been fed throughout their lives doesn't make sense. So there's every possibility that Lucius may come to see it as well. I hope. As for what actually happens second year, with this chapter I've started a thread that may get Sirius out of Azkaban a bit sooner than in canon…and given who he's related to, that may shake things up a bit. :)

Someone – Glad you're enjoying it. Here's the next chapter.

Natalia – I'm glad you're enjoying the story. Orion will see the mirror, but not until he goes looking for the stone. I figure it's not really important that he know what the mirror is for for it to do what I need it to. I did think about including a scene where he sees it, but couldn't for the life of me figure out what Orion would have seen. Because he's actually quite happy with his family. He loves them. So, having his parents appear in the mirror seems too easy, you know? I honestly don't think that would be what he sees. But what he would see, I haven't got a clue. Thanks for your input on the sequel. I'll be sure to let everyone know in the final chapter what I've decided.

24

I Swear I Saw a Dragon

Easter holidays came with a pile of homework, and the group of friends spent all their time in their meeting-room together, working hard on papers due by the first day back from the holiday. At one point, Ron, fed up with working, decided to head down to the library for the next set of books they would need, and returned with a puzzled expression on his face.

When Orion asked him what was bothering him, it took him several minutes before he was able to shake off his astonished state and explain. “I…I saw Hagrid in the library,” he said in a strange voice.

Draco looked up from the paper he was working on. “That oaf can read?”

Neville glared at Draco. “Just because you don’t like him, Draco, that doesn’t mean he’s stupid. He used to be a student here, once.”

Draco snorted. “Right. Did he flunk out?”

Neville flushed. “Um…no. He…well, he was expelled.”

Even Hermione stopped working at this. “What happened?” Orion asked him.

“Dunno, really. He just said he was expelled, and that’s why he’s not allowed to do magic.”

Draco’s eyes narrowed. “That’s not true. I’ve seen him use magic before. He’s got that…that…umbrella of his.” He turned to Orion. “You know, the pink one?”

Orion shook his head, but Ron interrupted before Draco could press the issue. “Look, whether or not he can do magic is beside the point. You’ll never guess what section of the library he was in.” He leaned in over the table, and the others all followed suit, despite the fact that they were quite alone in the room.

“Where, Weasley? Was he looking in the Restricted section?” Draco asked.

Ron glowered at him, but answered anyway. “No, he was in the dragon section.”

Orion made a face. “Dragons? Why would he be looking up dragons?”

But Draco had a gleam in his eye. “Do you think he found one, Weasley?” He grinned, and Orion began to worry where this might lead. “Do you think he’d let us see it? That would be so cool. Even father doesn’t have a dragon.”

Neville looked a bit nervous now. “I don’t know, Draco. Dragons are pretty dangerous. Couldn’t Hagrid get into trouble for having one?”

Ron’s eyes widened, and he nodded. “Yeah. My brother Charlie works in a reserve in Romania. He says that dragons are vicious, even if they’ve known you their whole life. They can bite you in half just as soon as look at you. It’s why we have laws here in Britain against owning them. The wild ones are bad enough. Imagine having one in your house!”

Draco sneered. “Chicken, Weasley? It’s just a little dragon. It can’t hurt you.”

Finally, Hermione couldn’t keep quiet any longer. “I think it’s horrible. Hagrid’s a sweet man, but he does tend to be a bit blind when it comes to certain animals. What if this creature gets loose? It could hurt a student. Or worse. We have to tell him to get rid of it.”

Draco snorted at this. “Well, I don’t know about saving the world, Granger, but I definitely want to see the dragon.” He stood. “Anyone else with us?”

Vince and Greg nodded, but Ron and Neville looked doubtful. Orion decided to stick with the better part of valour and stay with his friends. “Well, I’ll stay here with Nev and Ron. But feel free, Draco. You’ll have to tell us what kind of dragon he got.” Personally, Orion hoped that it was all wishful thinking on Hagrid’s part, but the man did seem

to have a predilection for large, scary animals. Like the three-headed dog in the third-floor corridor.

Hermione sighed. “Well, I’ll come, but only because I refuse to believe Hagrid would be that stupid. I mean, he lives in a wooden house. Keeping a dragon there would be impossible.”

Draco shrugged dismissively, and led the way out of the room. The four of them were silent most of the way down to Hagrid’s hut. Truthfully, Draco was a bit nervous. The huge groundskeeper was a bit intimidating, really. Before now, Draco had tried to stay as far from him as possible. But if the man had a dragon, he just had to see.

When they arrived at the hut, he was pleased to let Granger take the lead. After all, the man was practically a savage, at least according to his father. If he was going to attack anyone, Draco was more than willing to let it be Granger. She hurried up the steps, and knocked once on the door, then waited. When there was no answer after a minute, she knocked again, a bit harder. This time, the door opened a crack.

“Who’s there?” a gruff voice asked.

Draco pulled back and let Granger do all the talking.

“Hello, Hagrid. We thought we’d come for a visit. May we come in?”

The dark eyes peering out through the darkness inside seemed to examine Hermione for several minutes. “‘M rather busy at the moment. C’d yer come back later?” he asked.

“Well, actually…” Hermione began, but Draco could hold his tongue no longer.

“Look, you great, dumb oaf. We know you have a dragon in there, and we want to see it. So either let us in, or we’ll go to McGonagall with what we know.”

Hermione glowered at him, obviously fighting the urge to hit Draco, but he couldn’t care less. He wanted to see that dragon, and by god, he would.

Hagrid was silent for several minutes while he thought this over, then opened the door wider. “Well, come in, then, though there’s not much ter see. You’ll not be telling anyone if I show you? You promise?” the huge man asked as they shuffled in.

Draco nodded distractedly and looked cautiously around. The hut was little more than a room, crammed with an oversized table, chairs and a huge bed. The furnishings were crude, and Draco shuddered at the idea of touching anything in the room. It looked as though it would all be extremely unhygienic.

When the door closed behind Greg, Draco also realized just how warm the room was. There was a fire in the hearth, and Draco quickly saw why. “An egg!” he cried out, surprised. “How did you get a dragon’s egg?” He turned to look at the huge man, who was hovering over them as though worried they would steal it from him.

Hagrid shrugged, and rumbled, “Won it. Down at the Hog’s Head the other night.”

“You won a dragon’s egg from someone? What were you playing? A game of strength?” Draco asked, wide-eyed.

“Nah, just a bit of cards. Won it fair and square, too.”

Draco shook his head, and turned back to the egg. “What breed is it?”

“Norwegian Ridgeback,” Hagrid said proudly. Got a book from the library that tells all about it.”

“How long until it hatches?” Draco asked.

“Not too sure. Shouldn’t be long now, though. A couple of days at most, now that it’s in the fire. Mother dragons breathe on their eggs to keep them warm, so I’ll just be keeping it warm until it’s ready.”

“Hagrid, don’t you realize how dangerous keeping a dragon will be?” Hermione finally managed, horrified. “Dragons are huge, and you’ve got this one-room house. How are you going to keep it from destroying your home?”

Hagrid flushed. “I know what ‘m doing, Hermione. I’ve looked up all sorts of information about the breed, and dragons in general. I’m sure I can keep it under control.”

“Hagrid, you live in a wooden house. And dragons breathe fire. What are you going to do about that?”

“Oh, leave off, Granger. Obviously the man knows what he’s doing. He’s already got the egg in the fire where it needs to be. I’m sure he’ll figure out everything else just fine.” Hagrid looked at Draco gratefully, but Draco was still gazing at the egg in awe. “Can I come watch?” he asked. “When it hatches, can I come see?” He turned to the man, who was looking at him, amazed. Draco had never had so much as a kind word for him before. And now he was asking to come visit him again.

Overwhelmed and pleased that the boy was suddenly being so polite, Hagrid nodded.

When Draco, Hermione, Vince and Greg returned to their meeting room, Orion noticed the flush on his brother’s cheeks and the gleam in his eye. He sighed. He figured that Hagrid must have a dragon. It was the only thing he knew that could leave Draco in such a mood. But when Hermione flopped onto the couch next to Neville, she put a temporary rest to his fears. “It’s not a dragon. Yet. Hagrid has a dragon *egg*,” she said, scowling.

Ron goggled at her. “A dragon’s egg? Where did he get something like that?”

Draco smirked. “Said he won it from someone at the Hog’s Head. Apparently he won it in a game of cards.” He turned to Orion. “You should have seen it, Ori. It was gorgeous.”

“It’s insane,” Hermions said. “He’s going to burn down his home, and then we’ll have a mad dragon loose on the grounds.”

“Oh, do be quiet, Granger. I’m sure everything will be fine. He seemed to know what he was doing. He said he’d let me know when it was hatching, Ori. Want to come watch with me?”

This was one of those things that Draco and Orion had never really agreed on. Draco thought dragons were fascinating, Orion thought they were horrifying. “No thanks. I’m sure you’ll tell me all about it anyway.”

Draco shrugged. “Your loss.”

Less than a week later, shortly before breakfast ended, and classes were to start, Draco received a note from the groundskeeper, with only two words written upon it: *It’s time*. Orion and Draco argued for several minutes about whether Draco should go down to Hagrid’s immediately. Draco didn’t think he could wait for classes to be over, and that he should just skip them, but Orion insisted he at least attend morning classes, and that he would accompany him to the hut at lunchtime.

Unfortunately, just as he was saying this, Nott passed by, eyeing them suspiciously. Orion tried to clamp down on the uneasy feeling this left him with, but there was nothing he could do about it. If Nott had heard them mention the dragon, he’d just have to deal with it when the time came.

Classes went incredibly slowly, with Draco asking every five minutes if the class was almost over. Finally, it was lunch time, and the two boys hurried out of the castle and to Hagrid’s hut. Orion was rather surprised at Draco’s willingness to return to the man’s home, but he knew that Draco would do almost anything to see a real live dragon. He’d only been dreaming about them since the day Lucius told him what his name meant.

Draco rapped on the door, and it was pulled open quickly, and the boys hurried inside. Orion looked around. The room was awfully rustic, but in a homey, lived-in sense. And it seemed to fit the huge man well. He and Draco had hurried to the table where a huge egg lay, rocking back and forth, and uttering strange popping sounds.

“There’s already a huge crack on this side,” Hagrid was telling Draco, and Orion was surprised to see that Draco was listening to the man and watching in fascination as the egg spun a bit, and began to crack a little further. He must be far gone, Orion thought, if he didn’t even care where he was or who he was talking to.

There was a sharp, tearing sound, and a large part of the shell fell away, revealing a large round eye. The eye blinked, then closed, and soon the head had pushed through the crack, and other parts of the shell were beginning to peel away. Despite the danger, Orion could not help but feel fascinated by the prospect of watching one of the most dangerous creatures in the world being born.

Hagrid and Draco were grinning equal, identical, maniacal grins as the beast pushed itself free of the remainder of the eggshell, and flopped tiredly onto the tabletop. Hagrid cooed at the beast, then Draco reached out to pat it…and screamed. “Agh, it bit me!”

Orion hurried to his side. “Did it break the skin?” Hagrid seemed uninterested in Draco’s injury, and was trying to calm the beast, calling it “Norbert.” The fingers seemed red, but weren’t swollen. But still, Orion wanted to get them out of there. “Come on, Draco. We should at least get that looked at.”

Draco, though, no longer seemed interested in his injured fingers. He was staring, horrified, at the window. Orion spun around in time to see the face of Theodore Nott disappear from the window. The boys looked at each other, their hearts sinking. How would they get out of this one? They bade Hagrid good-bye, and hurried back to the castle, hoping that Nott hadn’t found a teacher yet, but he was nowhere to be seen. Sighing, they made their way into the Great Hall, where lunch was just coming to a close, and managed to coerce their friends into skipping classes for the rest of the day. They couldn’t have Nott holding something like this over their heads. They had to find a way to get rid of the monster before it became a serious liability.

After a quick stop at the Hospital wing, the brothers arrived in their meeting room, and set Vince and Greg to stand guard just inside the door of their meeting room while the others discussed what could be done about the dragon.

Orion was now furious. Draco’s hand had been bandaged by Madam Pomfrey, but she said she wanted to look at it again the next day, as by the time they’d made it to her, the fingers had already begun to swell. She’d said whatever had bit Draco appeared to be poisonous, and she wanted to keep a close watch on him for the next few days.

Hermione agreed that they needed to do something, but she thought that the best thing to do was go straight to McGonagall. “After all,” she said, “isn’t that what the teachers are there to deal with?”

Draco snorted at this. “Gee, Granger, if the teachers are just here to control the animals, then I can understand why you’re here, but what are us purebloods doing here?”

“Shut it,” Ron and Orion both snapped at him at the same time.

“Look,” Neville said, “Why don’t we find someone to take the dragon? I’m sure I could convince Hagrid to let him go if we found someone who would take him. He’s just so soft-hearted, you know? He wouldn’t want to abandon it.”

“Soft-hearted?” Orion growled. “If I hadn’t been there, that thing could have bitten off Draco’s head, and Hagrid wouldn’t have noticed.”

“Yeah, well, he gets caught up in his creatures sometimes. I’m sure he didn’t mean anything by it.”

“Didn’t mean anything by it!” Orion shouted.

This time, it was Draco who tried to calm him. “Ori, I’m fine. It was my fault. I should have known better than to try to pet it. I’ll survive. Let’s deal with the problem at hand, shall we?”

Orion nodded, and slumped back in his seat, glowering.

Draco took up the thread from before Orion’s outburst. “So, the problem is, who do we know that would be willing to take in a dragon? Let alone have space, facilities and training to deal with them?”

Hermione looked pensive, Orion shrugged in annoyance, and Ron and Neville looked lost. Neville was gazing over Ron’s shoulder, when suddenly he straightened with a jerk. “Charlie!”

Ron looked at him as though he’d cracked. “What are you on about, Neville? I’m Ron, remember?”

“No, Ron, your brother, Charlie! The one who works in Romania? On a…”

“Dragon Reserve!” Ron crowed exultantly. “It’s perfect, Nev! You’re a genius.”

They were all staring at the two boys now. Finally Draco rolled his eyes. “Care to share with the rest of the class?”

“My brother Charlie, he might be able to take the dragon,” Ron said, grinning.

“And, how, exactly, would we get it to him?”

Ron was silent at this, and Neville’s smile faded. But Orion couldn’t bear to let all that enthusiasm go to waste. “Well, it certainly couldn’t hurt to try. Do you want to borrow Saiph, Ron, so you could send him a letter? Tell him it’s urgent, and that we need to get rid of the beast as soon as possible. I’m sure he’ll have at least some idea to help. Even if he can’t come and get the bloody thing himself.”

Ron nodded. The rest of their time before dinner was spent working out a letter to Charlie, which they mailed before heading down to dinner. Time passed slowly in the next few days while they waited for Charlie’s response. Orion noticed Nott watching them frequently out of the corner of his eyes, and worried that he was just waiting for the right moment to drop the secret to get them into the most trouble. Finally, one morning before breakfast, Saiph landed in front of Ron at the Gryffindor table, and it was all Orion and Draco could do to keep from running over to find out what Ron’s brother had said.

Ron handed them the letter as they walked down to Potions, but they weren’t able to read it, as Nott was lurking nearby with Blaise, and even Vince and Greg cracking their knuckles didn’t seem to chase him away. When lunch finally arrived, they hurried off to their meeting room, where they read the letter.

Dear Ron,

How are you? Thanks for the letter -- I'd be glad to take the Norwegian Ridgeback, but it won't be easy getting him here. I think

the best thing will be to send him over with some friends of mine who are coming to visit me. They've agreed to arrive a bit early, and can be at the school by Saturday. Hope this letter reaches you by then.

The important thing is that they mustn't be seen carrying an illegal dragon.

Do you think you could get the Ridgeback up the tallest tower at midnight on Saturday? They can meet you there and take him away while it's still dark.

If this is okay, send an answer to my friend Davin Verikson as soon as possible to confirm. Your owl here should be able to reach him.

Love,

Charlie

They hurriedly drafted a response letter to Charlie's friend, and sent Saiph off with it before lunch was over. That dealt with, Hermione and Neville headed down to Hagrid's to convince him that this was the best thing for the dragon. They came back after dinner had begun, wrung out, but smiling. "He's agreed," Hermione stated after collapsing onto one of the sofas. "The thing's grown so big, Hagrid's dog doesn't even want to be inside any more."

Neville nodded. "Its tail kept thumping the wall while we were talking to him. Shook the whole house."

Hermione sighed. "Anyway, he's promised to crate him up for us, so all we'll have to do is pick him up about an hour before midnight tomorrow night."

"If we can keep Nott from finding out," Draco said. "He's been on our backs ever since he saw it."

"I'm sure we can shake him if we need, Draco." Orion said. "So, who should go? We can only fit two people under the cloak with a crate that would be big enough for that monster to fit in."

"Well, Draco's out 'cause of his hand," Ron said.

Draco glowered for a moment, then shrugged. “True enough. But it’s Orion’s cloak, so he should go.”

Orion wanted to disagree, but really, he wasn’t particularly comfortable loaning the cloak out, even to his closest friends, so Draco did have a point. “Right. So who’s with me, then?” he asked.

Neville and Hermione looked horrified at even the idea of being out of bed that late at night. Ron sighed. “Well, he’s going to my brother, so I suppose I’ll go.”

Orion grinned at his friend. “It’ll be fun, Ron. You’ll see.”

The next day was spent in their common rooms. It wouldn’t do to be seen together so soon before attempting something so illicit. The Astronomy Tower was out of bounds for any student without specific permission to be up there, either from Professer Sinestra herself, or because they were in a late night class at the time. None of them were sure what the punishment for such a thing would be, but they were sure it wouldn’t be good. They had all decided before separating for the evening that it would be better to simply spend the day apart so as not to arouse suspicion.

Shortly after lunch, Draco and Orion were working on their papers for History of Magic, when Draco sat up suddenly, his eyes wide. “Draco?” Orion asked. “Is something wrong?”

Draco looked as though he were about to tell Orion that their father had disowned them. “Um, Ori, remember the letter from Ron’s brother?”

Orion shrugged. “Of course.”

Draco swallowed and avoided Orion’s eyes. “Well, I put it in our Potions text, because I figured that it’d be safe there.”

Orion couldn’t see where this was going. “It’s not safe there?”

Draco bit his lip. “Well, it might have been…”

“But?” Orion pushed.

“I kind of loaned it to Pansy this morning.”

“You what!” Orion shouted.

Draco shushed him, then grabbed their things and pulled Orion to their dorm. Once they were safely inside, he turned to Orion. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking.”

“I can tell!” Orion moaned. “You do realize that if she finds it, the first person she’ll show is…”

“Nott, I know. I’m sorry!” Draco was practically pleading now.

Orion sighed. “I guess we’ve got no choice,” he said. We’ll just have to get it back from them and see if it’s still there.”

“How do we do that without arousing suspicion? I mean, I told her she could use it until Monday. If I ask for it back, she’ll know something’s up.”

Orion frowned at this. “True.” He thought for a minute, then said, “Well, have Vince or Greg get it from her. They’re always borrowing our stuff, and she won’t realize that there’s anything unusual if they ask for it, right?”

“I suppose.”

The two went out in search of their friends, and found them at a table playing Exploding Snap. Somehow, they both seemed to be losing. Greg’s eyebrows were singed, and Vince’s whole face was covered in soot. Vince was quick to agree to go get the book, just to avoid the possibility of another explosion, which happened shortly after he left the table, incinerating the last of the cards. He returned with the book in hand and the three of them hurried back to the dorm room before looking through it to see if the letter was still there. It wasn’t.

“Well, that’s it then. We’ll have to find another way to get the dragon to Weasley’s brother,” Draco said.

“Draco, we can’t. Saiph hasn’t returned yet, and so Charlie’s friends will be up there tonight, waiting for us to show with the dragon. This is

our only chance. We'll just have to watch and see what Nott does." Orion turned to Vince and Greg. "Can you watch him for me after I leave tonight? It's absolutely vital that we be warned if he's out and about. He'll know I'm gone, so he'll probably come looking for me."

The two boys nodded, and Orion sighed. "Well, I suppose that will have to do. Unless you can think of another way to stop Nott from following us tonight, Draco."

Draco shook his head, and the four settled down to wait for the evening to come. They all knew there was no chance of getting any more work done today.

That evening, Orion went to bed an hour after dinner, claiming a stomach ache. He didn't think anyone was fooled, but it was better safe than sorry. It was always possible that Nott didn't actually know, and so it would be best to proceed like he did not. Shortly after eleven, Orion snuck out of the dorm with the cloak wrapped tightly around himself. Vince and Greg had been snoring a little too loudly to be authentic, and Orion hoped that he was right in thinking that they were faking.

He hurried up to the Gryffindor tower where he knocked lightly on the Fat Lady's frame. She wasn't too pleased with him, but the portrait opened a moment later, and Ron stepped out, looking carefully around before ducking under the cloak with Orion. They hurried back down the stairs and out to Hagrid's cabin, where they pounded on the door until he opened it. The room lay in near-ruins. The table was on its side, and the bedclothes that hadn't been torn to shreds lay in rumpled heaps scattered across the room.

Hagrid led them around the back of the cabin, sniffling the entire way. "They will be good ter him there, won't they?" he asked. Ron nodded while Orion made shushing noises. There was a crate at the back of the cabin that wobbled and shook, and every so often emitted a roar of discontent. "It's all right, Norbert. Yer jus' goin' on a trip, thas all…" Hagrid blubbered as he patted the crate heavily. "I've packed him some food, and some bedding, and even his toy teddy bear," he told the two boys morosely. "Bye bye Norbert. Mummy'll miss you…"

The two boys were very glad to finally leave the cabin, though they had very little time by this point to make it up to the tower. They hurried as fast as they could, the huge crate swinging heavily between them as they ran. They were nearly at the tower when a shout caught their attention, and they shrunk back into the shadows.

However, they were quite pleased by what they saw. Snape had Nott tightly by the shoulder, and was snarling down at him. “I don’t care what you heard, Nott. Spying on other students does not give you leave to be out of bounds after hours. I will be taking ten points from you, and if you utter another sound, I will take five more.” Nott opened his mouth to argue. “For each word!”

Nott’s mouth snapped shut, and he glared up at his Head of House as Snape led him away.

The two boys grinned broadly at each other before practically dancing up the stairs to the top of the tower. At the top, Orion yanked off the cloak and stuffed it in his pocket as they both shouted with laughter for a moment.

“That was brilliant!” Ron said. “Did you see the look on his face? I was nearly ready to snog Snape when he told him he’d take points per word,” Ron grinned.

“And the great thing is, even if he had told Snape, there’d be no proof,” Orion responded. “An absolute dream. I couldn’t have asked for it to go better.”

Their jubilation was interrupted when Charlie’s friends appeared, and Davin dismounted to introduce himself. They watched as the witches and wizards attached Norbert’s crate to a sling they’d created to carry him, then wished them luck as they rose out of sight into the night.

Their elation carried them all the way down the tower stairs, and right into the waiting arms of Filch, who was looking particularly pleased. Ron and Orion looked at each other, horrified. They’d forgotten to put back on the cloak! How could they have been so stupid? Filch led them down to the dungeons, and to Snape’s office, which stood open and empty. Orion assumed he was accompanying Nott back to the Slytherin common room. He only hoped that he’d get off as easily as

Nott had. If not, he and Ron might well find themselves on the Hogwarts Express tomorrow morning, unable to return ever.

When Snape did appear, though, things became even worse. He was accompanied by Vincent, who looked relieved to see Ron and Orion, and tried to tell them that Nott had tried to follow them. They shushed him quickly, but Snape's glower had turned into a glare. He waved Filch from the room, then shut the door behind it before warding it for sound. When he turned back to the three boys, they shrank back from his glower.

His teeth clenched as he spoke. "Mister Malfoy. Is there any particular reason you felt the need to play such an amazingly—amusing—joke on your fellow Slytherin? Mister Nott was convinced you and your brother had somehow gotten your hands on a dragon." Orion paled, and avoided Snape's eyes. "Nothing to say in your own defense? I assume that he had been bothering you, so you decided to set him up?" Orion shrugged. It was better Snape believe this than find out the truth. "I see. I seem to recall a certain group of Gryffindors who used to play little tricks of this nature on unsuspecting Slytherins, but never in my life did I believe a Slytherin would pull a stunt like this on his own house!" By the time Snape had finished, he was shouting.

At the mention of Gryffindors, Orion's eyes shot back up to his Head of House. "Sir…"

"No, Mister Malfoy. I don't think so. I have been wrong in the past, but I do not believe this is one of those times. I believe fifty points will teach you a lesson."

Orion's eyes grew wide. "Fifty points, sir?"

Snape's scowl turned to a sneering smile. "Fifty points—each. And a detention, as well."

All three boys paled at that.

Pimpilidimpi – Thanks for reviewing. I'm glad you're enjoying it. Always happy to answer questions. :D

Y.D.K.W – Glad you're enjoying it. Coming up on the end. Two or three more chapters after this one, so two or so chapters until the philosopher's stone scene. :D

Darkangelgep – just that little secret about their shared tattoos. ;) Glad you enjoyed the birthday. If it does, it won't be in THIS story…but perhaps in the future sequels, if I do them.

Crystal Cat-chan – Glad you like it. As long as Harry's happy with the Malfoys, he'll probably be allowed to stay there. But I'm not sure what will happen when a certain Slytherin resurfaces…

Arsinoe – Thank you. I always look forward to your reviews. Especially since we seem to be on similar pages where our stories are concerned. :)

Bahzad – Well, I'd imagine being alone with Quirrell and Voldemort will be as dark as it gets in this one, but if I do the next books, it may get darker.

Gatogirl1 – I imagine it would have gone a long way to making him a bit less of a prat, at least. Glad you're enjoying it. Sorry about the Quidditch, but I couldn't come up with a good way for one, let alone two first years, even if they ARE Malfoys, to get on the Quidditch team, so… But next year, they will be. Well, Orion will be at least. As for the mirror, I'm sure Orion longs for something, I'm just not too sure how to convey them in that type of way, you know? And as for Draco and dragons…maybe the polish has worn off a bit on that obsession now? ;) And thank you so much for the lovely complement. :D

BreetanyaViolet – Thank you.

25

Into the Woods

When Orion and Vince returned to their dorm, they found Draco and Greg waiting for them on Vince's bed. They quickly settled onto the bed and closed the hangings, charming them for privacy. But seeing the hopeful look in his brother's eyes, Orion felt his heart drop into his stomach.

"Nott got caught," Draco whispered gleefully.

"We saw," Orion shrugged.

"So, Vince caught up to you in time?" Draco asked.

Orion shook his head ruefully. "I wish he had. Things might have ended differently then."

Greg's eyes went as wide as they could. "Did they catch you with the dragon?" he asked.

Orion shook his head, and he could see Draco relax immediately. "No, we got him sent off okay, it was what happened after that I could have done without."

"So, what *did* happen then?" Draco was scowling now. "I mean, you made it back. What's wrong?"

"When Ron and I left the tower, we forgot to get back under the cloak. I still had it in my pocket when Filch found us."

"Filch?" the look on Draco's face was one not only of worry, but almost as though he were queasy. "I suppose he didn't just let you off?" he asked, though the hope in his voice was doused with doubt.

"That'll happen when Hagrid adopts an animal that isn't dangerous in any way," Orion scowled. "He took us to Professor Snape."

Both Draco and Greg's eyes went wide at this. "What did he do?" Draco whispered.

Orion managed a painful smile. “Well he already had Vince here.” He nodded towards Vince, who shrugged.

“Caught me as I was trying to get up the main staircase. Just as he was bringing Nott down. Made me walk with him and Nott to the common room before he took me to his office.”

Draco was looking back and forth between the two boys. “So what did he do?”

Orion winced. Draco wasn’t going to like this, and he was almost sure he knew what his brother would say. “He took points, and assigned a detention.”

“Detention,” Draco growled. “He didn’t give Nott detention.”

“Yeah, well, he didn’t find Nott coming out of the Astronomy Tower in the middle of the night, either.”

Draco shrugged. “It’s hardly a capitol offence, Ori. And he’s been rather laid-back since the two of you made peace. How many points did he take?”

Orion winced again. He had hoped that Draco wouldn’t ask, but he should have known it was too much to ask for. “Fifty points.”

Draco’s eyes went round. “Fifty points! That’s ludicrous! He’s never taken that many points from our house. No matter what we’ve done.”

“Well, he took that and more, tonight,” Vince broke in, and Orion tried to wave him off, but Draco noticed and narrowed his eyes.

“What does that mean, Ori? He took more than fifty? How many?”

“Well, he took ten from Nott…”

Draco’s face reddened. “He only took ten from that clod? That is completely unfair! I’ll write to father. See if I don’t!”

This was exactly what Orion had been hoping to head off the entire conversation. There was no way he wanted Draco sending Lucius a

letter about this. It would be bad enough that Snape would probably do so. “No, Draco. I deserved it. Anyway, it wasn’t just fifty. It was fifty for each of us. Me, Vince and Ron.” Draco’s eyes bulged, and Orion hurried on to prevent the explosion. “But it’s from two different houses. And so Ron’s points pretty much cancel half of ours out. So really, we only lost fifty…”

“Fifty each?” Draco’s voice shrieked, and quickly quieted when Zabini and Nott growled at him sleepily from their beds to “Shut up.”

“Yes.”

“The others are going to be furious, Ori. They’ll try to kill you!”

“Shush, Draco. It’s too late to do anything about it now. We should never have gotten involved in the first place. So could you remember that next time you think someone has a dragon?” And with that, Orion rose from Vince’s bed, hurried to his own, and crawled under his comforter, still dressed. He was too exhausted to care what it would do to his uniform.

The next morning he woke to Draco sitting at the foot of his bed. “You’re not going to want to go out there,” he said. “They’re furious. And they know it was you. Nott told them. The seventh years and the Quidditch team are just waiting for you to go out so that they can pound you to a pulp.” He looked at Orion for several minutes, an odd expression on his face, before adding, “*Now* can I contact father?”

Orion climbed out of bed, stretching. “And have *him* tell me I deserved it? Please, Draco, you know he’d only be on their side. I shouldn’t have been out of bed. Don’t worry. I’ll wear the cloak all day.” He changed quickly into fresh clothes, tossing the rumpled ones he’d worn to bed at Draco, who folded them and placed them next to him at the foot of the bed. Once he was dressed, he pulled out his cloak, and draped it over himself, the hood still down as he talked to Draco. “How’s Vince holding up?”

“He’s doing okay,” Draco shrugged. “He and Greg escaped to our meeting-place when the older kids started looking nasty. Besides, he’s pretty big for his age. I’m sure they’d rather beat you to a pulp. Easier to do.”

Orion rolled his eyes. “Come on, let’s get out of here and see how Ron’s doing.”

He pulled up the hood and they made their way out to the common room. Orion could see that Draco hadn’t been kidding when he’d said the older Slytherins had been waiting for him to appear. They all sat at a table, facing the hallway leading to the dorms, and looked up as one when Draco appeared. They seemed quite annoyed when all they could see was Draco. “Where’s that runt brother of yours, Malfoy?” Flint, who was the captain of the Quidditch team, snarled.

Draco shrugged as he continued past them, Orion close on his heels so as not to bump into anyone accidentally. “Dunno. Thought he was in there, but he wasn’t,” he said blandly. He smiled a thin-lipped smile as he continued. “Sent a letter to my father, though,” he said silkily, as he met the older boy’s eyes. “Thought he might want to know about what was going on in his sons’ lives.” Several of the younger Slytherins slunk away at this, but Flint wasn’t cowed.

“Yeah, Malfoy? Well, you tell that runt for me that we don’t deal well with those who make us look bad. Especially when they lose us a hundred points a pop,” and with the word “pop,” Flint smacked his balled fist into his other, open hand, with a sound that made Orion flinch.

Draco, though, seemed unimpressed, and shrugged nonchalantly. “Well, if you can catch him, Flint, maybe you can deal with him. But I’d worry about catching him first,” he smirked, then turned, and continued his way across the room, all eyes now pinned on him. Once they were past the table, Orion could hear some of the older boys making their way towards the dorms, obviously on their way to check out Draco’s story that Orion wasn’t there. At least he had this cloak. If he’d had to deal with those gorillas face to face, he might not have made it out alive.

Draco made it to the common room door, and opened it before turning back to taunt Flint some more. “I do hope you don’t try to cross our father, Flint. I don’t think he’d take too kindly to it.” Orion knew Draco was only doing this as an excuse to hold the door open,

but he couldn’t help but wince. Draco certainly wasn’t helping to improve his image in Slytherin.

They made their way up to their meeting room, and Orion was thrilled to see he wouldn’t have to fetch Ron, which he certainly hadn’t been looking forward to. The Gryffindors were already there. Vince and Greg were talking quietly in a corner, Hermione sat on one of the couches reading a book, and Ron and Neville sat at the chessboard, though Ron was obviously not paying any attention, and Neville looked at the chessboard dubiously at best.

He stepped into the room after Draco, closed the door behind him, then took off his cloak. Ron looked up and gave him a pained smile. “Hey, Orion. How bad is it in the dungeons? Neville and Hermione are the only Gryffindors talking to me any more. If we didn’t have this room to escape to…”

Orion nodded and sank down in the chair next to his best friend. “I know what you mean. I only hope Snape doesn’t get it into his head to get the Headmaster to take it from us. It’s going to be the only thing that makes being at Hogwarts livable for a while.”

Draco leaned over Neville’s shoulder and scoffed. “Oh, budge up, Longbottom. Even when he’s this distracted, you still can’t win against him?” Neville scooted a seat over, looking relieved, and Draco began to play in his stead.

Ron grinned. “I think my day just improved. Hope you’re prepared to lose painfully, Malfoy.”

“In your dreams, Weasley.”

The entire day was spent in their meeting room, with either Hermione or Neville joining Greg to get food from the kitchens in place of Vince. Unfortunately, at curfew, they had no choice but to return to their own common rooms. Orion wasn’t too worried about Ron. The Gryffindors weren’t particularly violent, but he knew that he and Vince were facing a far greater danger in entering Slytherin once again.

They made their way down to the dungeons, Vince and Orion obscured by the cloak, but Orion was certain that this time, they

would be discovered. He knew he'd be lucky if the cloak survived intact. Most likely, the upperclassmen would tear it to shreds.

Before they could reach the door to the Slytherin common room, though, Snape appeared. "Mister Malfoy, Mister Goyle. I assume that the other two are here as well, under that cloak?"

Draco glared at him for a moment, but Orion pulled off the cloak so that Snape could see them. "We are." All he could do was hope that somehow, Snape would manage to keep them from being pulverized by the older Slytherins.

"Good. I have a letter from your father. I informed him of this, and he sent me a letter to pass on to you." Orion could feel the blood drain from his face. What would Lucius say about this? He was immediately relieved, though, that Lucius felt that Howlers were beneath him.

"Thank you, sir," Orion said, taking the letter from him.

Snape smirked. He was about to turn away, when he turned back. "Oh, and you will be serving your detention next Saturday evening. You are to meet Filch in the Front Hall at curfew." With that, there was a swirl of cloak, and Snape was gone.

"Detention with Filch?" Orion groaned.

Draco looked consolingly at his brother. "Well, at least it will be over with soon, anyway."

Orion shrugged, and he and Vince pulled the cloak back over themselves before Draco opened the door to the common room. When they stepped in, everyone looked up. Orion knew they couldn't see him, but it was hard to convince his brain of that fact. He and Vince hurried past Draco and slunk carefully around the edge of the room as they watched Flint approach Draco once more.

"That wimp brother of yours still hiding out there somewhere, Malfoy?" he sneered. "He can't stay out there forever, you know."

“I wouldn’t know, Flint. He seems to have given me the slip as well. Perhaps he’s left the school.”

Flint snorted. “Bull shite, Malfoy. I know you know where he is, and if he doesn’t show himself soon, maybe we’ll have to take it out on you.”

Greg stepped between Draco and the older boy. “Wouldn’t try that, Flint. Don’t think his father would like that, you know?”

“And what do I care what Malfoy Senior doesn’t like? He’s not here. But Junior here is. And he and his brother are twins. I say they share in the blame.”

Orion couldn’t watch any longer. Flint was right. He couldn’t hide forever. Blaise and Theo would probably give them up the moment they saw them in the dorm room anyway. And so what if Flint beat him up? Lucius would make sure he paid, and he’d get a nice cushy bed in the hospital wing overnight. At least then it would be over, right?

He slipped out from under the cloak, Vince following his lead soon after, and the cloak was carefully tucked into a pocked before Orion called out to get Flint’s attention. “Hey, dung-for-brains! Wrong brother. We’re not identical, after all. Or are you just so blind that one blonde head is the same as another?”

Flint and the other students whipped around to see Orion and Vince standing near the dorm hallway. Flint scowled before moving across the room, and Orion couldn’t decide if it was a good that the common room was so large, because it gave him time to prepare, or bad because it gave him too much time to contemplate his fate. And then Flint and the others were there, towering over him, and Vince stood in front of him, ready to take the beatings meant for both of them rather than let him get hurt.

“Back off, Crabbe, it’s Malfoy we want.”

“No. The points were taken from me, too. And Nott, if you want to split hairs. But I don’t see you bothering either of us, Flint. Why is that?”

Draco and Greg appeared on either side of them then, and Draco responded before Flint could. “It’s because he’d rather beat up the smallest victim. It wouldn’t do for his victim to be able to fight back, now, would it?” he sneered.

“Shut your trap, Malfoy,” Flint growled, but the others were now looking to see what Flint would do now that four first-years had basically called him a coward. Orion knew now that if Flint backed off, the others would as well.

Flint glanced around at the crowd, then back at Draco and Orion, who were now standing side by side. His lips drew up in an ugly grimace, showing off crooked teeth, and his eyes narrowed. “Fine. You’re off the hook this time. But don’t think I won’t remember, Malfoy. You will pay.” With that he turned and walked back to where he had been sitting when they entered. Slowly the rest of the students dispersed, some to their dorm rooms and others back to where their books still lay open.

Draco and the others moved quietly towards their dorm. Another disaster averted. For now, anyway. Orion only hoped it lasted. And he shuddered to think what awaited him come Saturday.

The next week went quickly. Far too quickly for Orion. All he could do was wonder what horrific fate awaited him and Vince on Saturday. What corner of the castle they would be scrubbing with toothbrushes in order to get every crevice. Draco had to nudge him frequently during classes when teachers called on him because he was so distracted worrying about how that weekend would go.

And when he wasn’t worrying about that, he was mulling over the letter that Lucius had sent. It had not been nearly as harsh as Orion had expected it to be, instead telling him that he had better keep his nose clean from now on, if he ever wanted to invite his Gryffindor friends over again. For Lucius, that was tantamount to encouraging him. Why on earth would he even mention the idea, let alone threaten to take it away, if he never wanted it to happen again? Orion assumed that part of that was his mother’s influence, but he wasn’t sure why Lucius would even think of allowing it again.

On Wednesday, he was distracted by a magazine dropped on his breakfast plate by Saiph. On the cover was a picture of he and Draco along with Neville and Ron. It was a picture of them taken at the birthday party. There was a headline on the cover reading, “Malfoy boys make Gryffindor friends: has the Malfoy family given up its dark ways?”

He caught Draco’s eye, and the two pulled closer so that they could read the article inside. There were more pictures from the party there, most with just the four of them, but an occasional shot of Vince or Greg as well. There was even one shot that Orion particularly liked with the four boys with their arms over each other’s shoulders, and Ron clutching Scabbers, his pet rat, in his right hand. Scabbers’s nose would twitch now and then, then try to climb up to where Orion’s hand was draped over Ron’s shoulder. The four of them were grinning broadly.

The article itself wasn’t bad at all, mostly talking about the party, and how it had been held every year since the boys were four, only mentioning how this year the guest-list had expanded by two by their request. Orion wasn’t sure how they had gotten the information, but he was pleased that the article didn’t seem too bad, despite the headline.

After class, they hurried to their meeting room and waited for their friends to show up so they could show them. Since the dragon, they’d been meeting there each day, just so they would all have friendly faces to look forward to. Though the Slytherins had backed off, they were still less than pleased with Orion and Vince, and the Gryffindors weren’t speaking to Ron at all, aside from Neville and Hermione.

Hermione and the boys appeared soon after, and Orion was quick to show them the article. Ron grinned. “Huh. Guess we reformed you, eh, Malfoy?”

Draco snorted. “The day you reform me, Weasley, is the day you win every game against me.”

Ron’s grin widened. “You’re on, Malfoy.”

But before the two could move towards the chessboard, Hermione spoke. “Look, I realize this week has been stressful, but perhaps we should be putting this time to good use. After all, exams are coming soon. Shouldn’t we be revising?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Granger, the books can wait until next week, when the detentions will be over and done with. I think a few more days of freedom could only help in the long run.”

Hermione pursed her lips. “Fine. But I’m going to start drawing up study schedules. After all, we don’t want to fail, do we?”

Orion shook his head. “I highly doubt we’ll fail, Hermione. Besides, Draco’s right. It can wait a bit. I’m too distracted now anyway. It’d all just go right over my head. Next week, okay?” And with that, he followed Ron and Draco to the table where they began to set up the board for play.

Then it was Saturday again, and Orion and the others spent the entire day in their meeting room. Hermione was busily drawing up study charts, but the boys watched Ron and Draco play game after game against each other, Ron winning two out of every three games. At a quarter to nine, Draco smirked as he managed to put Ron in checkmate once again. “You’ll have to do better than that, Weasley, if you want to ‘reform’ me.”

Ron groaned. “No fair, Malfoy. You didn’t have the distraction of a detention tonight to bother you.”

“Excuses, excuses, Weasley,” Draco said, the smirk still firmly plastered on his face.

Orion sighed. “We should probably go down now if we don’t want to be late.” He stood, and the others followed him to the Front Hall, where Filch and Nott stood waiting.

The group stopped feet from Flich, and Draco growled, “What’s he doing here?”

Filch smiled wickedly. “Well, he broke the rules too. He has detention as well. And if the rest of you don’t wish to be joining them, you should get to your common rooms…Now!”

Neville and Hermione shot a worried glance at Ron, then hurried up the stairs, while Draco simply folded his arms. “You can’t do anything to me, Filch. It’s not curfew yet.”

But Orion didn’t want to push Filch too much. “Go on, Draco. We’ll be fine.”

Draco glanced at him. “You sure?”

Orion nodded. “We do outnumber Nott three to one. I doubt there’s much he can do to us,” he smiled.

Draco nodded, and he and Greg moved down the stairs towards the Slytherin dungeon.

When they were gone, Flich glowered down at the four remaining students. “Well, I’d better be taking you off to Hagrid. Don’t want to keep him waiting too long.”

Ron’s eyes widened. “Hagrid? We’ll be serving detention with him?”

Orion worried about this. What would Hagrid have them do? Have them tend to some of his more dangerous beasts? Still, maybe he’d go easy on them, since he knew why they’d been out of bed.

Filch sneered. “I wouldn’t go feeling too relieved, you little hellions. Hagrid may be a soft touch, but your detention will be served someplace that will make sure you regret your actions—the Forbidden Forest.” The grin that spread across his face then was the most evil thing Orion could ever recall seeing in his life.

Crystal Cat-chan – There will be Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw friends, but not in this story. They’ll appear in further adventures if they get written. It won’t be Cedric, he’s far too much older than the boys, but Luna might join them later. I do intend to add more girls. I’m thinking Susan Bones will join them eventually. Not sure who from Ravenclaw

yet though. So, did you catch the clues for the next story in this chapter? :D

Pimpilidimpi – Well, Snape has been waiting for something like this to happen ever since he found out who Orion really was. So he's rather feeling vindicated. And quite enjoying taking the points. I think he'd take the cloak, if he'd seen they had it on them.

Misao, Demon Master – Thank you for reading the story. Glad you're enjoying it. And you shouldn't have to wait too much longer for the end. Hope you'll stick around to read it. Thank you for all the complements. Between myself and my beta, we manage to catch most stuff, so it's nice that it shows. I really love the interactions between Harry and Draco in the books, so I wanted to pe able to explore them from a different angle. I'm glad it works. :)

Bahzad – no, he really doesn't. But how can Draco resist his namesake? :D

Gatogirl1 – yay! A Christmas review. Thank you for the lovely present. You know, even though I never really thought about that scene in the original books, I can see that being at least a part of why Draco did what he did in SS. :)

26

Shadow of the Dark

On the trip down to Hagrid's hut, Orion felt worse than he ever had before, even including his last two trips to the Manor. They were expected to go into the Forest? They'd never make it out again. All four students were silent the entire walk, but Filch filled the silence with his chuckled guesses as to what would happen to them within the boundaries of the Forest.

As they approached Hagrid's hut, all four boys began to walk slower and slower, and finally Filch grabbed Orion and Nott by the collars. "You won't be getting off that easily, boys," he cackled, and dragged them around the side of the hut, where Hagrid stood waiting. "Here they are, Hagrid. A wretched bunch, all. I doubt you'll be getting much use out of them."

"Ah, leave off, Filch. They're just kids."

Filch scowled. "They might be, but they're damned nuisances. If I had my way…"

"I know, I know, you'd hang them in chains from yer office ceiling," Hagrid responded dismissively. All four boys looked horrified at this idea, but Hagrid quickly continued. "Ye've delivered them, now git back to the castle. I can certainly handle four youngsters without yer help."

Filch scowled for a few more minutes before turning and heading back to the castle, muttering under his breath about lenient groundskeepers and ne'er-do-well kids.

Once he was gone, Hagrid turned to the boys. "Professor Snape has a little task for you boys," Hagrid rumbled. Orion felt himself sigh with relief. If they were doing something for Snape, it would almost definitely be picking plants for potions. He could deal with that. "I have a list of stuff, and I thought we could make quick work of it if we split into two teams."

Nott sneered at the other three boys. “I’m not teaming up with any of them,” he said disdainfully.

Hagrid smiled as though he’d given the other three boys a compliment. “Good!” he beamed. “You can come with me, then, and the other three can go with Fang, here,” he patted the head of the large dog at his side.

Orion looked at the dog dubiously. Another of Hagrid’s pets. He couldn’t help but wonder what this one would do to them.

Ron took the dog’s leash from Hagrid, looking nearly as dubious as Orion. Hagrid handed Orion a list and a basket, and the five of them entered the Forest.

“Yer to stay on the path,” Hagrid told them as the made their way to the first branch of the path. “Nothin’ can hurt you as long as yer with me or Fang,” Hagrid told them. Orion knew he was trying to be reassuring, but he couldn’t help recalling the tales Lucius had told him and Draco about some of the creatures that lived in the woods.

At the branch, Hagrid and Nott took the left path, and the three friends took the right. They’d had a bit of success in the first few minutes, but after finding a rather difficult nightshade root, suddenly the ingredients on the list seemed to be impossible to find. They were all a bit too tense to talk from worrying about what kinds of creatures they might run into, so they continued along the path quietly, scanning the side of the path for the plants they were looking for. After several minutes of this, Ron noticed something gleaming on a low branch protruding into the path in front of them.

“What’s that?” he asked the other two.

They all moved to the branch, and Orion took a closer at it to see what was shining there. His eyes grew large looking at the substance, which reflected almost like a mirror. “Unicorn blood,” he said quietly.

“What?” Ron said, surprised.

“It’s unicorn blood, Ron.”

“How do you know that, Orion?” the red-haired boy asked.

“Because father spent last summer quizzing Draco and I on unusual potions ingredients so that we would be prepared for anything Snape might throw at us this year. The question is, why is there unicorn blood?”

Ron shrugged. “Maybe it caught itself on the branch, and bled?”

Orion rolled his eyes. “Unicorns don’t hurt themselves. If a unicorn is bleeding, that means someone or something hurt it.”

“Why? Everyone hurts themselves sometimes, Orion. Surely a unicorn could as well.”

“Ron, unicorns are healing creatures. For a unicorn to hurt itself, it would have to be hexed or cursed in the first place. It’s not in their nature to be clumsy, it just doesn’t happen.”

Ron looked pensive. “So, what do we do?”

“Well, we need to let Hagrid know. He’ll know what to do.” Orion turned to Vince. “Would you be willing to go find him for us, Vince?”

The larger boy nodded, and before Ron could offer him Fang’s leash, he set off at a fast trot back the way they had come. The two boys watched him disappear into the darkness, then turned to each other.

Ron bit his lip. “So, now what?”

Orion shrugged. “Dunno. We probably shouldn’t go too far. Otherwise, they might not be able to find us. He turned back to the branch, but in doing so noticed something glimmering in the middle of the path further ahead. “Ron. Look. More blood.” He moved forward, but Ron grabbed his sleeve.

“Orion! We can’t,” he hissed. “Who knows what has done this. And whether or not it’s still in the woods. We should wait until Hagrid gets here.”

“Ron, the unicorn could still be alive. If we follow now, we might be able to help it. If we wait, it’ll probably be dead when we find it. Do you want that to happen?”

Ron looked at his friend for a few minutes, then his shoulders sagged. “No. But promise me that if we see anything dangerous we’ll back off until Hagrid gets there?”

Orion nodded. “Of course.” He didn’t want to mention that if they saw anything dangerous, they’d be unlikely to go unnoticed by it that long. It wouldn’t do to upset Ron more.

The two boys picked up the trail, and even Fang seemed a touch subdued as they moved from silvery puddle to glistening smear along the path. After several minutes, Orion realized something. “Ron, do you hear anything?”

Ron looked at him oddly. “I hear you breathing. And our footsteps.”

“That’s just it, Ron. Shouldn’t we at least hear the leaves rustling from creatures moving or something?”

Ron’s eyes grew wide and he swallowed. “Do you think…You don’t think that whatever we’re following is so scary all the other creatures in this forest are scared of it, do you?”

Orion shrugged, but the two boys pulled closer and continued down the path with their shoulders almost touching. By this point, Fang was whining with each step, and pulling back on the leash, almost as though he were trying to pull the boys away from whatever had hurt the unicorn.

They turned a corner, and there, in the centre of the path, lay the unicorn. But it wasn’t alone. A dark shape was crouched above it, its head lowered to the unicorn’s side. Orion let out a low hiss from the pain that flared in his scar as the shape turned to look towards the two boys. The two boys stood stock-still in terror as the shape surged up, then turned fully towards them and began to approach. As it drew closer, the pain in Orion’s scar grew worse, and it was all he could do to keep standing. He could hear Ron whimpering in his ear, but both

boys felt frozen in place, unable to flee from the wraith as it approached them.

Then there was a thudding of hooves, and a huge equine body interposed itself between the two boys and the menacing shape. The shadowy form reared back, and fled before Orion could even make out what the new creature was. Once the dark shape had disappeared, the new creature turned, and Orion could not hold back the gasp. It was a centaur.

The centaur seemed fairly young, and had white-blond hair and a palomino body. It took one look at the boys, then after a moment's silence, he spoke in a deep voice. "You are all right?"

The two boys nodded, unable to speak.

"My name is Firenze. You are students up at the school?"

Orion managed to swallow most of his fear at this. The centaur didn't seem threatening, and he had saved them from whatever it was that that creature had been. "Yes. I'm Orion Malfoy, and this is Ron Weasley. We were picking plants for Professor Snape when we saw the unicorn blood and followed it. We weren't sure what we would find, but I wasn't about to let something hurt a unicorn."

Firenze blinked for a moment. "That was very brave of you. Brave, but dangerous. You must be careful in these woods, students of Hogwarts. There are creatures lurking here that even I would not wish to meet."

At this, Ron seemed to find his tongue. "Like what?" he asked tremulously.

The centaur seemed to take their measure before answering. "There are those in the world who would do great evil, and there are things in this forest that they could use to help them in that task." His eyes caught Orion's, and Orion was unable to look away. "Surely you know this, Orion Malfoy?"

Orion's mouth dried at the thought that Lucius Malfoy was indeed a man who used any means to accomplish what he wanted. Including stealing a year-old child from the ruins of his parents' home.

Ron looked between the two of them, finally unable to hold back any more. "What do you mean? What does he mean, Ori?"

"Ron Weasley, do you know what use unicorn blood can be put to?"

At the question, Orion felt all the blood drain from his face. He hadn't even considered that. But Ron beside him was still clueless. "No, what?"

"It is a monstrous thing, to slay a unicorn," said Firenze. "Only one who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips."

Ron's eyes were so wide, Orion was sure that they would pop out of his head. "Did you know that, Orion?" he managed in a whisper.

Orion nodded. "I told you, Ron, father quizzed Draco and I on all sorts of unusual potions ingredients before we started school. I didn't think I'd ever come across any, though." He looked at Firenze. "What…who was that?" he asked the centaur.

"Can you think of no one who might require such help, Orion Malfoy? Perhaps someone who has simply been biding his time, waiting for his moment to return? Someone who needs only a bit of help to regain what he once was?"

Orion wanted to deny it. Lucius had always said that the Dark Lord would return some day, and that when he did, he would become more powerful than ever before, and that eventually, the whole world would bow to his might. That the Malfoys would be at his right hand when he did so, and that they would be revered almost as gods. But that had been before Orion had known who he was. Now he had a much greater understanding of what it would mean for the Dark Lord to return. Surely the Dark Lord would not suffer him to live. The boy

who had been his downfall, raised by Malfoys or not, would be his first victim.

“You can’t mean…” he finally managed to choke out, “the…the Dark Lord?”

“Voldemort, Orion Malfoy. And he, like I, will recognize you for who you are.” Orion could not conceal his shock at this. Firenze smiled. “A simple change of name cannot conceal the power within you…Harry Potter.”

Orion swallowed. It was the first time he could actually recall someone calling him by his true name. It was an odd feeling. As though in using that name, rather than the one that Lucius Malfoy had given him, the centaur had somehow given him something back.

Before he could respond, though, Hagrid, Vince and Nott appeared. “Malfoy, Weasley, what…” Hagrid saw the body of the unicorn and froze. “Now what happened here?” he said in a horrified tone.

Ron and Orion turned to each other, wondering what to say. But Firenze answered for them. “There is something attacking the beasts in this Forest, Hagrid. You would do well to return these boys to the castle, before their safety is further jeopardized.”

Hagrid turned in astonishment at Firenze’s voice. “Firenze. What are you doing here? And how was this unicorn hurt? I didn’t know anythin’ could hurt a unicorn. Certainly nothin’ in this forest.”

“I heard these foals approach the being that did it, and stepped in to help them before the creature could do them harm. Again, Hagrid, I urge you to take them back to the school. It is not safe for them here.”

Hagrid nodded his huge head. “Right, right. Well, thank you, Firenze, for helping the boys.”

Firenze nodded his head once, then vanished into the surrounding trees. Hagrid herded the boys out of the woods, stopping quickly at his hut to tie up Fang, then shooed the boys up to the school. “Need to go see the headmaster,” Orion heard him mutter as he entered the Front Hall. Nott quickly disappeared down the stairs to the dungeon,

but Ron, Vince and Orion watched as Hagrid hustled noisily up the stairs towards the second floor, where he disappeared down the hall.

Ron looked over at Orion. “How did that centaur know your name, Ori?” he asked in a hoarse whisper.

Orion took a deep breath, then shrugged. “I don’t know that I want to know, Ron. See you tomorrow, okay?”

Ron nodded, and watched as the two Slytherins descended to the lower levels of the school before hurrying off to Gryffindor Tower.

The next day found their little group arguing over the meaning of what Ron and Orion had seen. Draco was sure it had simply been some random, if dangerous beast, Hermione wanted to research everything that fit the description, Neville was too terrified about the boys’ story to say much of anything, and Vince and Greg were inclined to agree with Draco. They, like Draco and Orion, had been raised to believe that the Dark Lord was a martyr. The man who wished to save the Wizarding race. Surely he would not attack the son of one of his greatest and most loyal supporters.

But Orion knew that Firenze had been right. Worse, now he knew that he would either be deserted by his family, cause a rift in the family when the Dark Lord returned to power, or he would destroy it utterly. Now the true meaning of who he was became clear. Though raised as a Malfoy, he was not. And when the Dark Lord returned, Lucius would be unable to convince his master to spare the boy who had been his downfall. He would be alone when facing Voldemort. He would have to find his own way.

He watched as Draco debated with their Gryffindor friends, and began to mourn the loss of his own sense of belonging to the Malfoy family. The sense that told him that so long as he obeyed the rules laid down for being a perfect Malfoy, he would always have a place in the family; he would always be protected.

Though he had almost felt as though things were going back to normal after their birthday party in April, now he knew that his life would never be the same. Without leaving the room, he began to pull

away from his brother. The next week was spent doing little more than homework and going to and from classes. When Draco addressed him, he simply agreed, and allowed Draco to do whatever it was he wished.

Right up until Defense Against the Dark Arts that Friday.

The class was as dull as always, and Quirrell had just dismissed the class and turned his back to clean off the board when Orion felt the same pain he had felt twice before. Once in this very same room…and the other time, in the woods as the creature approached him. He stiffened, and Draco caught his arm. “Ori? What’s wrong?”

Orion ripped his horrified gaze from their teacher, and motioned his brother and their friends to the door, trying desperately to ignore the pain until it faded as he drew further from the classroom. Which rather clinched it, he thought.

Draco was still trying desperately to get his attention. “Orion, what is wrong with you? You’ve been acting odd all week, but this tops it all. Are you feeling okay?”

“It’s Quirrell,” he said just loud enough for the others to hear him. “Quirell’s the one who was in the Forest on Saturday.” He sped up, hurrying to their room. Classes could wait. This was important. Draco, Vince and Greg hurried after him, but Orion couldn’t concentrate on them right now. He had to figure this out. He collapsed onto one of the couches, lost in thought.

It was Quirrell. But what did that mean? Hermione was right that Dumbledore wouldn’t just allow someone who might hurt them into the school. She’d said it over and over. So did Dumbledore not know then? Perhaps he should go tell him. He jumped to his feet, and the other three, who had surrounded him on the couches jumped.

Draco reached his arm to keep him from hurrying off once again. “Orion, what’s going on? You think Quirrell was the one who was in the Forest on Saturday, right? But you said that the centaur said it was the Dark Lord. It can’t have been both.”

Orion tried to shake him off, but Draco's grip on him sleeve tightened. "I don't know, Draco. But it's the same pain. Remember when I first felt it?" Draco nodded. "It was in his class that I collapsed. That's significant. Don't ask me what it means. Maybe he's helping Voldemort or something. I don't know." The other three boys hissed at the use of the name.

"Don't call him that, Ori. Even father doesn't call him that."

But Orion was sick of hiding from someone who would come for him anyway. If not saying his true name wouldn't protect him, what was the use of hiding? "Why not? It's just a name. Just like you're Draco, and I'm Orion." Then he thought for another second before turning to look at his brother's worried face. "Did I tell you he called me by my real name?"

Draco's eyes widened. "The Dark Lord?"

Orion shook his head. "No, the centaur. He knew who I was, Draco. And he said that Voldemort would, too. Just because I look different doesn't mean he wouldn't know me." He paused. "And when he returns…"

"Father will protect you. You're his son."

Orion's throat closed. He missed the absolute knowledge that Lucius would always be there for him. "Will he? Do you really think he'd defy his master for someone he's not even related to, Draco?"

Draco opened his mouth to disagree with him, but Orion shook his head. "Trust me, Draco. He's not going to give up everything just for me. No matter what." He looked at the other two boys, who had been silent throughout the entire exchange. "You don't have to risk yourselves. I realize that being with me will only put you in danger if Voldemort succeeds."

Vince looked at him quietly, but Greg was quick to shake his head. "If the Dark Lord is after you, then he'll have to deal with us, right Vince?"

Vince nodded and smiled. “Our fathers told us to always be there for you two. No matter what. If he wants to hurt you, Orion, we’ll be there to protect you. That’s what friends are for, right?”

At that moment, Orion felt horrible for every ungenerous thought he’d ever had about the other two boys. “Thanks, guys.” He turned back to Draco. “Look, Draco, I…” but before he could finish his thought, Draco growled at him and pulled him into a hug.

“Well, father might desert you, but you’re still my brother. I said it before, and I meant it.” He pulled back, and looked at him. “Nothing will change my mind, Ori.”

Orion couldn’t stop the smile this caused. It was good to know that Draco was on his side now, at least. Only time would tell if that would change. “Come on, we need to go tell the Headmaster. He needs to know, if he doesn’t already.” They left their room to see that everyone had begun to head down to the Great Hall for dinner. “Well, at least it’ll be easy to find him,” Orion shrugged. He hurriedly led the way down to the main hall, where Ron, Neville and Hermione caught up with them before they entered.

“Where were you?” Ron asked. “We’ve been looking all over for you. None of the other Slytherins knew where you were. Well, none of the ones that would speak to us,” he said, rolling his eyes.

“It’s Quirrell,” Orion responded. “He’s helping Voldemort somehow. We have to stop him before he goes after the stone. We were just going to tell the Headmaster.”

“Whoa, Ori, slow down. What are you talking about?” Ron asked.

“Look, I don’t have time to explain, but Quirrell is going after the stone. We thought he might be, and we were right. We have to stop him. And Hermione’s been saying all along that we should go to the Headmaster, so I’m going.” With that, he turned and entered the Great Hall, followed by the others. But as he approached the Head Table, his heart sank. Dumbledore wasn’t there. And he had no idea where his office was located. And even worse, Quirrell did not seem to be there either.

At the sight of so many students approaching the Head Table at full-tilt, McGonagall hurried to meet them, Snape close on her heels. “Mister Malfoy,” she said in her most chastising voice, “I don’t know what you and your friends are up to…”

“Professor, we need to see the Headmaster,” Orion cut through her ringing voice.

McGonagall glared at him as though he’d asked her to do a head-stand. Her lips pursed, and she scowled, Snape’s eyes narrowing as he, too gazed down at them. Her voice was nearly a growl when she responded. “Mister Malfoy, I don’t know why you wish to see the Headmaster, but he is currently unavailable. He will be back late tomorrow. The Minister for Magic sent an owl asking for his presence, and I am quite sure I am capable of dealing with whatever it is you need.”

Orion glanced around the room, then dropped his voice so that only McGonagall, Snape, and his friends could hear him. “It’s about the stone, Professor.”

“And which stone would that be, Mister Malfoy?”

“The Philosopher’s stone,” he hissed in an even lower voice.

McGonagall’s eyebrows shot up. “Mister Malfoy, I do not know how you know about that, but believe me when I say that the stone is as safe as it possibly can be, and that if you and your friends do not go to your tables immediately, I will dock another ten points from each of you,” she hissed menacingly.

The group looked at each other, then separated quickly and moved to their tables. The last thing they needed to do was lose more points. They all ate as quickly as possible, then moved to the door almost as one, before Snape caught the brothers’ shoulders. “Misters Malfoy, I would like a word, if you do not mind…”

The brothers glanced quickly at each other. They knew it was hardly a request. They waved on their friends, who hurried from the room, carefully avoiding Snape’s dark gaze. He led the boys from the hall

and down to his office where he closed and warded the door before turning on the two boys.

His mouth twisted, and he moved to his desk, keeping their gaze the entire time. “I will not ask how you found out about the stone, but I do understand your concern about it. Believe me when I tell you that it is quite safe where it is. Were you to try to retrieve it, you might well make things worse. You do not intend to go after it, do you?”

“Of course not, sir,” Draco replied in his most placating tone. “We were simply concerned. We simply wanted to make sure that the teachers are aware that it is in jeopardy.”

“Of course,” Snape replied. “However, as the two of you seem to be unable to keep from causing trouble, perhaps I should ensure you do not go after it?”

“Not necessary at all, sir. We were just going to return to our common room and work on our homework,” Draco responded.

“Very well. But I will be checking in from time to time, and if I do not find you there, be assured that your father will hear of it.”

Draco nodded. “Of course, sir.”

Snape waved them away, and the two hurried from the room. “Why did you tell him that, Dray? Now he’s going to be checking on us all night!”

They hurried to the common room, and past it to their dorm before Draco responded. “Look, he was going to watch us anyway. There’s no way we could have gotten around that. But it doesn’t really matter anymore, does it? You’re going to go after him tonight, aren’t you?”

Orion stared stonily at Draco for a moment before shrugging. “So?”

“So, I can’t speak for the others, but I’m going with you. Now, let’s get that cloak of yours, and get up to the room to see what the others think.”

Orion grabbed his cloak, and the two boys huddled under it, then made their way back through the common room, stopping only long enough to let someone coming in open the door for them before slipping through and hurrying up to their meeting room. They found the others waiting there tensely. They pulled off the cloak after closing the door behind them, and settled onto one of the couches.

It was Hermione who spoke. “So, what happened, Orion? Why are you so sure it’s Quirrell?”

“Earlier this year, I had this horrible headache. It was sudden, like someone had stabbed me in the forehead with a knife, or something. It’s how we found out about my scar. Anyway, when it started, I was in Quirrell’s class that day. Only, it never occurred to me that that might have something to do with it.”

“How do you know he did?” Neville asked.

“Well, Saturday, when that thing was approaching me and Ron, I felt the same pain. No difference at all.” Hermione opened up her mouth to argue, but Orion held up his hand. “Just let me finish, okay?” She nodded. “Today, after Quirrell dismissed us, as Draco and I were getting ready to leave, I felt the same pain again. And when we left the classroom, the further we got from him, the better I felt.”

“So, what does that mean?” Ron asked. “Are you saying that Quirrell is You-know-who?”

Orion’s brow knitted at this. “I…Well, I don’t know. But there’s a connection. And I’m even more positive now that we know Dumbledore is gone. Did any of you notice that Quirrell wasn’t at the Head Table tonight?” The others shook their heads. “I think he’s the one who sent the owl to Dumbledore to get him out of the castle. I think he’s going after it tonight. And I’m going to stop him.”

He felt Draco nod. “And I’m going with him.”

Darkagnelgp – not sure what you’re asking, but if you’re referring to how cruel he was to the boys, let’s just say he’s feeling rather gratified to be able to give detention to James Potter’s son…

Pimpilidimpi – Glad you liked it. I actually quite enjoyed writing Flint, which surprised me. Maybe I'll have to do a ficlet with him in it or something. :D

Arsinoe – No, they're going with Hagrid, I just wanted to give Filch his chance to gripe. ;)

Misao, Demon Master – um, no guestbooks, please? ;) This is a fairly quick update. Glad you're enjoying it.

Dark Catalyst – Here you go. Was that fast enough?

Crystal Cat-Chan – oooh, I never thought about what Lucius could do. That's a scary thought. I'm not too sure how this'll all go, to be quite honest. I keep trying to figure out how Lucius would reconcile his love for his son (Orion), with his duty to his master, and it rather stumps me. We'll see what happens if I ever do the second story.

Beth5572 – Here you go, thanks for reviewing.

Bahzad – Thank you.

Fischergirl – Thank you. Not this year. He's still getting used to his real identity, and he's still got a shock or two coming with the next chapter, so I figure it'll be a while before he decides to reclaim his looks. At the very least, not until towards the end of the next story, when he will meet his real father's friends, and want to find that connection that Lucius obscured by changing his looks. If not then, probably the story after.

27

Through the Fire

The others stared at them for a moment. Finally, Ron broke the silence. “You’re going after him? But…”

Hermione was quick to interrupt. “Orion, just because you think the teachers don’t know is no reason to go. It could be dangerous.” Neville nodded at her side. “Do you want to be expelled?”

“I don’t care. Look, Hermione. This is Voldemort we’re talking about. Quirrell may just be on orders to find the stone, or Voldemort might be with him, but either way, once he’s been restored, he’ll come after me. And I’m not ready to die just yet, but it doesn’t matter whether I’m here or at the Manor. He will come for me eventually. I’d rather it be sooner than later.”

The group was silent for a moment, then Orion sighed. “None of you have to come with us. I’m going, no matter what any of you say.”

Neville was the first to speak this time, his soft voice loud in the quiet room. “But how do we get past that dog, Orion?”

Orion looked at him, shocked. “You want to come too?”

Ron answered for him. “Of course. Do you think we’d let you go alone?”

Orion turned to Hermione, who smiled at him. “He’s right, Orion. No matter what else, we’re friends. And friends help each other. Especially through something as dangerous as this. So, what’s the plan?”

Orion turned to look at Vince and Greg, who each nodded when he looked their way. Vince was the one who spoke. “We’d hardly be good companions if we let you do something so dangerous without going with you to see you through.”

Greg nodded. “Yeah. My da’d skin my hide if something happened to you.”

He felt Draco's hand on his shoulder, and turned to look at his brother, smiling. "I don't know what I'd do without you guys," he said.

"So," Draco finally said, "what's our first move? We won't all fit under that cloak, and that dog is a danger, as Neville pointed out."

Orion shrugged. "I don't know, but Quirrell's going to have to get past that dog as well. I say we just sneak up there and see if he's still there. We're going to have to play this by ear. After all, we don't know if that dog is the only thing guarding the stone."

Hermione nodded. "But who should be under the cloak, and how should the rest of us get there? We could do this in shifts…"

Ron shook his head. "That's no good. It'd leave some of us stranded, and whoever is without the cloak could get caught. I say we go up as a group, and just put as many as we can under the cloak."

Draco nodded. "Well, Snape is on the lookout for Orion and I, so we need to be under it, but I think we can fit one more. Maybe the rest can just go ahead of us, and try to move as fast as possible?"

"It'll have to do," Ron said. "Neville, do you want to be under the cloak?"

Neville shook his head. "No, Hermione should be under there. I'll go ahead with you guys."

Hermione gave him a smile, then turned to the brothers. "I guess you're stuck with me."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Whatever, Granger. Just stick to your side of the cloak, okay?"

Hermione rolled her eyes, but grinned. "Worried about catching something, Malfoy?"

Orion didn't wait to hear the response. "Come on, you guys. For all we know, he's already there. We have to go now if we're going to do this." He pulled the cloak on, and Draco and Hermione were quick to slip under as well. "Ron, you lead the way, and we'll follow."

Ron nodded, and led the way out of the room.

The corridors were rather silent, given that curfew was nearly upon them, so they made their way unhindered to the third floor, and the junction where they had first discovered the beast. However, when they pushed open the door, it was snoring quietly away.

When they had all entered the room, Draco closed the door behind them, and Orion pulled off the cloak, and stuffed it into his pocket. “Why is it sleeping?” he wondered aloud.

Neville shrugged. “Maybe it’s his bedtime?”

But Hermione was looking over in the corner, where a small harp had been enchanted to play. “I don’t think so. I think the harp is keeping it asleep.”

Orion looked dubiously at the still-strumming instrument. “In other words, it could stop at any time, and this beast would wake up.” He looked around trying to figure out what their next step was, when he saw the trap door in the centre of the room. “Looks like that’s the way ahead, but what if it’s also the way back? I think someone needs to stay here and make sure this beast doesn’t wake up, so that we can get out again.”

“I’ll stay,” said Greg. “Mum taught me a charm to get my windchimes to move outside my window when I was small and couldn’t sleep. It should work on that harp if it stops.”

“You sure?” Orion asked.

Greg nodded. “Vince can stay with me, and we can keep a lookout for you up here.”

“Well, that solves that then,” Draco said. He walked over to the trap door, and opened it. “I can’t see a thing.” The others crowded around him, and looked into pitch blackness. “Anyone willing to go first?”

They all looked at each other, and Draco snorted. “Never mind. I shouldn’t have asked. I’ll go.”

“Draco,” Orion said worriedly. “What happens if you’re hurt, or worse?”

“If Quirrell can make it, I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

“We don’t know he did. What if he’s lying down there, dead?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Look, the headmaster must have some way of getting to the stone if he needs to. I doubt it’ll kill me, Ori.”

Orion sighed. “Fine. But be careful, okay? And call up the minute you land safely.”

Draco nodded, and got a thoughtful, worried look on his face. “Look, if something happens…”

“Nothing is going to happen, right? You’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, but if it does, go to Snape, all right? He might take your head off, but at least you’ll be safe.”

Draco looked at him for another minute, then nodded and turned to the trap door, and jumped in. They all waited for a moment, Orion growing more and more nervous with each passing second, then heard his voice call from far below, “I’m fine. Come on down. There’s something soft to land on.”

Orion was the next to go, followed closely by Ron, Hermione and Neville. Unfortunately, when Neville landed, he took one look around him at the thing they’d landed on, a plant spanning most of the corridor, and let out a horrified squeak. “Devil’s Snare!”

The other three boys turned to look at him, but Hermione was already struggling to move to the side, where the plant had no purchase. “Hurry! Before it’s too late…” But Draco had already become quite ensnared by the plant, and Ron and Orion were being entwined even as she watched. Neville had made it halfway to her, but was panicking, and she could see how quickly the tendrils were enveloping him.

“Neville, what do we do? You’re the best of us at Herbology. What gets rid of Devil’s Snare?” Hermione’s voice was shaking as she questioned the struggling boy.

“I…I can’t remember,” he moaned.

“Come on, Nev, you know this stuff. We depend on you for it,” Orion urged.

Neville shook his head, but his brow was creased. “Um, Devil’s Snare…Strangles its victim,” he whimpered.

“Yes, Longbottom, we can see that. What else?” Draco’s voice was strained as he struggled against the plant’s hold.

“Um…Likes cold, damp places…”

“Yes…and?” Hermione prodded.

By this point, Neville had made it almost to the edge of the plant, and Hermione helped pull him out. “Come on, Neville, there has to be something.”

“I can’t remember,” he cried.

“Neville, you’re the best in our year at Herbology. You can remember this,” Ron said.

Neville took a deep breath. “Um…Well, if it likes cold and damp…” He looked up at Hermione. “Light! Fire or light!”

She grinned, and the two of them turned to the plant, casting Incendio on it as one. The plant shriveled, and the other three boys crawled out and onto the stone walkway Neville and Hermione stood on.

Once they were all free of the Devil’s Snare, the group moved quickly down the passage, wanting to get away from the plant as fast as possible. Draco was muttering under his breath about “incompetent Gryffindors,” but Hermione was quick to chide him.

“I didn’t see you coming up with the solution, Malfoy.” Draco went quiet after that.

They walked in silence for several more minutes when suddenly, Ron asked, “Does anyone else hear that?”

Neville looked puzzled, but Hermione and Orion nodded, and Draco said, “I thought it was just that plant moving at first, but it does seem to be getting louder, doesn’t it?”

Ron cocked his head to the side, listening intently. “It…it sounds like wings.” He looked puzzled, but continued. “I’d say birds, but it doesn’t sound right for birds. Maybe winged bugs?” Hermione, Neville, and Draco all looked horrified at the thought.

Orion didn’t want to waste any further time, though. “Come on,” he said, moving faster down the passage. After all, it wasn’t like they had any time to waste. They’d lost too much time already as it was.

They rounded a corner and entered a room filled with strange creatures fluttering near the ceiling. At first Orion thought Ron was right, that they were some kind of flying insect. But somehow, that didn’t seem quite right. He was distracted when he saw Draco move carefully across the room to the door set in the far wall. None of the creatures attacked him. So then why were they there?

Draco and Hermione were now examining the door, each trying several unlocking spells before shrugging and turning back to the other three. Neville was still gazing up at the flying creatures, but Ron was distracted by something else. “Look. There are brooms.” Orion looked to see where Ron was pointing, and sure enough, there were three brooms, just floating in mid-air to one side of the room.

“They’re keys,” Orion suddenly realized out loud, and Ron and Draco both turned and gave him an odd look.

“Ori, they’re brooms. How are we supposed to use them to unlock the door?” Draco asked.

“No, not the brooms. Those.” He pointed up at the things they had all thought were insects. “They’re flying keys.”

All of them looked at him for a moment, before he sighed. “We have to find the key that fits the lock. Probably with those brooms,” he indicated the brooms that Ron had found.

“So…who’s going?” Neville asked nervously.

Draco smirked. “Well, that’s easy, Longbottom, seeing as how you and Granger here can barely stay astride a broom to begin with.”

Hermione glowered at him. “I passed the flying test.”

“Barely,” Ron muttered under his breath. “Look, he’s right. Orion, Malfoy and I should go. We’re the best flyers, and we all play Quidditch when we’re allowed. We have the best chance of catching it.” He looked up at the fluttering keys. “If we can figure out which one it is.”

Orion started towards the brooms, taking the one in the middle. “Look, I think I can find it, if you guys will just back me up, okay?” he asked Ron and Draco. The two boys nodded, already grasping their own brooms. And then they were in the air.

“Do you have any idea what you’re looking for, Ori?” Draco asked.

He shrugged. “If Quirrell’s already used it, it’ll probably be obvious, won’t it? Because he had to catch it, right? So it’ll probably have been crushed for him to be able to do that. Unless he wasn’t alone…”

Hermione heard this, and called up. “Look for an old-fashioned key, Orion. Something in brass. That’s what the door’s handle is made of.”

He nodded down at her, and began to scan the keys around him. Finally, he saw it: a large brass key, one the wings of which was slightly crumpled. It was fluttering in a far corner of the room, and moving every time he did. It was obviously enchanted to avoid whoever might try to catch it.

He pointed it out to the other two. “There. If you two can come at it from either side, and I come at it from the bottom, we might be able to trap it.” The other two nodded, and the trio split up, Ron taking the left, Draco taking the right, and Orion diving lower. At a nod, all three

zoomed towards the key, which shot up and out of their reach. They tried a second time with as much success, but the third time, Orion was ready for it.

He motioned for Ron and Draco to chase it back into the corner, and then come at it from the sides and below, while he waited for it above. Orion watched as the two boys hurtled at it as one, and the key zoomed directly towards him, veering only at the last second when he reached out to grab it, his fingers scraping against the end of the key. He snatched it out of the air, and hooted gleefully. “Got it! Take that, Higgs,” he grinned.

Draco rolled his eyes. Orion had never stopped going on about how he knew he was better than the Slytherin Seeker. “Quit gloating and open the door, Ori. It’s not like Higgs or Flint can hear you.”

Orion, still grinning, swooped down on his broomstick, jumped off, and jammed the key in the lock. The door opened, and the group filed through. Straight into pitch-black darkness.

“What the hell is this?” Draco asked over Hermione’s horrified gasp at his swearing.

“Don’t know,” Orion said. “But we won’t find out unless we keep going. I think we should hold hands, just in case this is the next challenge. We don’t want to leave anyone behind.” He grabbed to the left and right. The hand on the left was smooth and manicured: obviously Draco. The one on the right was trembling. Neville, perhaps? “Everyone holding hands?” He asked, feeling horribly awkward. But still, if it kept them together, it was worth a little embarrassment.

There was a chorus of yeses, and so he began the trek across the blackened room. They were three steps into the room when light suddenly flared around them. They were on a black and white marble floor with statues lined up in two rows; one set facing away from them right where they stood, and the other set facing towards them at the opposite end of the room. The sides of the room were littered with rubble, as though another two lines of statues on each side had collapsed there.

“W-what is it?” Neville asked tremulously on Orion’s right.

Orion shrugged as he let go of both Draco and Neville's hands. "Not sure. But there's the door over there." He started towards it, and the others followed slowly behind. But when Orion reached the second row of statues, he found his way blocked. No matter how he tried to get around the statues, they always seemed to impede his progress. Finally, he gave up in disgust. "Well, it looks like the direct route won't work. Any ideas?" he asked, turning to the others.

Ron and Draco seemed to be keenly examining the statues around them, then turned to look at each other, and seemed to speak without words for a moment. Orion felt a pang of jealousy for a moment. Was this what it was like to be on the outside? He was so used to being the one who understood Draco. But apparently, despite Ron and Draco's mutually-agreed upon goading of each other, they had somehow built up a bond that he had no part in.

"What?" he finally asked, and the two looked at him, startled.

It was Ron who responded. "It's a chess set. A giant, wizarding chess set."

Surprised, Orion looked at the statues again. The line of identical, short soldiers in the front, and in the back: a castle to either side, next to each of them, a horse and rider, and next to them, a tall man wearing bishop's robes. And in the centre, an older man wearing a crown, and a beautiful woman, also wearing a crown. They were right. It was a chess set. But how did that help them? "Okay, so what does that mean? How do we get through?"

Ron glanced at Draco again, who nodded. "I…well, I think we need to play our way across."

Orion and the other two stared at Draco and Ron for a moment. "What does that mean?" Orion finally asked.

"I think," Ron said, "that we have to take the place of some of the pieces, and win against the other side."

Draco sighed in exasperation at the others' blank looks. "Look, Longbottom and Granger can take the two rooks, I'll take the queen—what do you want to take, Weasley?"

“I’ll take the knight, of course,” he grinned. “But what about Orion?”

The two boys examined Orion, and he repressed an urge to squirm. “Well?”

Draco and Ron looked at each other. “Bishop,” Draco said, and Ron was quick to nod. The group turned to the set of pieces on the far side from the door to notice that the pieces the two boys had mentioned had already left the board. They each moved to their places, but suddenly Orion realized there was a problem.

“Um, which of you will be deciding where the pieces move to?” he asked. Both boys were quick to claim the honour, to his amusement. Hermione was the one to solve the problem.

“Well, that’s easy enough. We need to win, right? So which of you has won more matches?”

Draco sneered at this, but Orion quickly shook his head. “She’s right, Draco. This isn’t about ego, it’s about getting to the stone.”

“Fine,” Draco scowled, and turned away.

Ron took a deep breath. “All right.” The first piece on the opposite side moved, taking this as a signal that they were ready, and the game was on. The first few moves were done in almost complete silence. The only noise being the breathing of the five students, the movement of the pieces, and Ron’s curt orders for each piece, and where it should move.

Their first loss came as a bit of a shock when a knight smashed a pawn to the ground, and it was dragged to the side of the board. Neville, Orion and Hermione paled at this, but Draco growled, “Keep your thoughts on the goal, Weasley, not the losses.” Ron grunted at him, and chose the next move. Unfortunately for Neville, Ron was so shaken that the square he directed Neville to turned out to be right in the path of one of the opposing bishops, and Neville was cracked over the head, collapsing to the ground. Hermione shrieked as he went down, but the other three boys yelled at her to stay where she was.

After this, though, Draco was quick to offer scathing comments about what he felt Ron was doing wrong, and how he would have done much better. But Ron had been possessed of a new energy, and managed to keep them from any more personal losses, though many of their other pieces were taken. After several minutes, Orion noticed Neville stand up from the spot where he had been dragged, and begin to watch the action.

“You okay, Neville?”

Neville nodded. “Yeah. Think I’m happier over here, though.”

Orion grinned. “Probably safer, anyway.”

The other boy smiled. “Definitely.”

The game continued for several more minutes, with many losses on each side, until all that was left of their pieces were two pawns, themselves, and the king. Ron was muttering to himself, but Orion was on the other side of the board, and couldn’t make out what he was saying. Right up until Draco began to growl at him. “Right, Weasley. Be a Gryffindor, see if I care.”

Ron turned on him. “Neville made it through okay.”

Draco snorted. “Well, Neville has a lot of accidents, and he’s still alive, so he must have some sort of magical protection. Doesn’t mean you’ll be okay, though.”

“What are you two talking about?” Orion finally asked.

Draco turned to his brother, a sneer on his face. “Weasley has decided to take the Gryffindor way out. He’s going to sacrifice himself.”

Hermione was horrified at this. “Ron, you can’t!”

Orion couldn’t help but agree with her. “Ron, there has to be some other way.”

"You have to get to that stone, Orion. And if this is going to help you with that, then this is what I need to do." Ron had a determined look on his face.

"Ron…" Orion wanted to tell him it wasn't necessary. That they could find some other way. But he knew that Ron was the best of them all at chess, and if he said they needed to sacrifice him to get to the stone, there was likely no other way to do it. "All right," he said. "Just be careful, okay?"

Ron nodded, then stepped forward. It was only seconds before the opposing queen pounced. She struck Ron hard across the head, and he crashed to the floor. Hermione screamed but this time remembered to stay on her square, and they watched as the queen dragged Ron to one side. As soon as the queen had returned to her space, Neville rushed to his side. They all stayed silent while he checked Ron over, then looked up and called out, "He's okay, just out cold.

Orion let out the breath he'd been holding, then turned to Draco. "So, what's our next move?"

Draco smiled ruefully. "There's only one move left that will win the game, Ori. Move three spaces to your left."

Orion looked up and realized just how close he was to the king. The queen had been a threat to him before she had moved to capture Ron, but now he was free to take the king. He moved forward, and the opposing king took off his crown and threw it at Orion's feet. They had won. The chessmen parted and bowed, leaving the door ahead clear.

Orion glanced over at where Neville sat tending to Ron's injury. Neville smiled at his worried look and said, "Go on. I'll make sure he's okay. Just keep Quirrell from getting that stone." Secure in the knowledge that Neville would watch over Ron, the three remaining players hurried through the door and up the next passageway.

The next passage was much shorter, and before they realized it, they were approaching the next task. "I wonder what it will be," Hermione whispered.

Draco wrinkled his nose. “I don’t know, but whatever it is, it reeks.”

Hermione looked concerned, and sniffed the air, then paled. “Um, guys…”

Draco turned to her. “What, Granger?”

“I…um…well, that smell? Now that you mention it, it’s familiar.” She looked worried, and Orion wondered what could be upsetting her so. “Well, I think…I mean, well, I’m pretty sure it’s…”

“Spit it out, Granger, we don’t have all day,” Draco growled.

“I think it’s a troll.”

“You’re joking, right?” Draco asked, looking much paler himself.

She shook her head.

Orion took a deep breath. “Well, guess we need to find out…”

Draco snatched his arm before he could reach out to open the door. “Are you crazy? Didn’t you hear Granger? It could be a troll!”

“Troll or not, we have to go in, Draco.”

But now Hermione’s eyes were wide. “Are you insane, Orion? That thing could kill us! What if it’s already killed Professor Quirrell, and is just waiting on the other side of the door to bash our brains in?” she asked shrilly.

“Look, Hermione. You don’t have to come with us. But I have to make sure Quirrell doesn’t get to that stone. That means going through this door.”

Hermione looked like she wanted to argue, but he could see her already backing down before she nodded. “Fine. But I’m still coming with you. The more of us there are, the more likely we can confuse it until we manage to knock it out…or something.”

Orion smiled. Then he turned to Draco. “Are you coming?”

Draco's lips thinned, but Orion knew he wouldn't really back down, now that Hermione had decided to go. It wouldn't do for a Malfoy to look less brave than a girl. Particularly one of her heritage. He nodded, and Orion moved to open the door once more. The door opened with a blast of particularly foul air, and the trio flinched for a moment, before they noticed the huge figure lying on the floor.

"Is it dead?" Hermione asked in a loud whisper.

"Just knocked out, I think," Orion responded. "Come on. He's obviously still ahead of us." He moved across the chamber and entered the next hall, Draco and Hermione close at his heels. The hall took a sudden turn, and they found themselves in front of the next door. Orion looked at each of them before swinging open the door. And found himself in a small room that contained nothing more than a table lined with an odd row of bottles.

Behind him, Hermione and Draco entered, and as soon as Draco had made it all the way through the door, a line of fire sprang up across the doorway, another igniting on the other side of the room. Across the only other exit.

Draco swore at this, and Hermione was quick to glare at him before turning to Orion. "So now what?" she asked.

Orion sighed. "Well, it looks like the only way out of here is with these bottles, whatever they are." He walked up to the table, and noticed a scroll sitting next to them. He unrolled it and read it. "Hey, look at this." The other two hurried to his side to read it over his shoulder.

It read:

Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,

Two of us will help you, which ever you would find,

One among us seven will let you move ahead,

Another will transport the drinker back instead,

Two among our number hold only nettle wine,

Three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line.

Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,

To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:

First, however slyly the poison tries to hide

You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;

Second, different are those who stand at either end,

But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;

Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,

Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;

Fourth, the second left and the second on the right

Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.

Hermione grinned. “A riddle! I love riddles.”

Draco scowled. “Yes, well, I hate them. The clues never make sense.”

Hermione laughed. “That’s why it’s a riddle, Malfoy. It’s not supposed to just make sense. You have to make sense out of it.” She examined the bottles for a moment, muttering to herself. “Yes, I think…”

“What, Granger? That they’re going to bite you before we get out of here? Or that we’ll die from lack of oxygen?” Draco growled.

“Draco, calm down. She hasn’t let us down yet. If she thinks she can figure this out, I say we let her,” Orion said calmly.

Hermione continued to mutter to herself for several minutes, before saying, “I’ve got it.” She smiled at Orion. "The smallest bottle will let us go through that door.” She pointed towards the door opposite the one they had entered through.

“But, Hermione…There’s only enough in that bottle for one of us to drink,” Orion pointed out. The bottle had been quite small to begin with, and half its contents were gone, obviously drunk by Quirrell when he had passed through the room.

Hermione looked stricken. “I hadn’t noticed. What do we do?”

Draco looked furious. “I don’t care. As long as I’m there with you, Ori. I won’t let you face that man alone.”

“Draco, listen, there’s no way…”

“There has to be a way!” Draco’s voice was rising not only in volume, but in pitch. “Who knows what he could do to you? I won’t let him hurt you.”

Orion grabbed his brother, shaking him slightly in hopes that it would calm him down, even just a little. “Draco, there’s only enough for one of us. And we all know I have to be the one to go. This is my fight. You can help me by going back out there with Hermione, and getting the headmaster and Snape. They’re the only chance we have now.”

Draco swallowed, but finally nodded. “I don’t like this, Ori.”

“I don’t either, but there isn’t much choice, is there?” He turned back to Hermione, who had watched their entire conversation avidly. “Hermione, which will get you back through the entrance door?”

She indicated a small round bottle at the end of the line. There was just enough there for two swallows. “I want you both to drink that, then get out of here and get whatever help you can: the headmaster, Snape, whoever you can find tell them what has happened.” He picked up the bottle and forced it into Draco’s hands. “Go on, drink. I’m not leaving until I’ve seen you both get through that door.” Draco scowled, but swallowed a mouthful, then handed the bottle to Hermione, who drank down the rest.

When she had finished, she stepped towards Orion. “Be careful, Orion. I wouldn’t have ever expected myself to say this, but you’re a good guy.” She smiled, then stepped through the fire leading back the way they had come.

Draco was still scowling at him. “If you get hurt…”

“I won’t. I promise.”

A silver eyebrow raised. “I’ll hold you to that. If you die, there’ll be hell to pay.” With a smirk, Draco turned and followed Hermione through the fire.

Once Draco was out of sight, Orion turned to the table, and downed the potion Hermione had indicated. He shivered at the feel of ice coating his insides, but quickly shrugged off the feeling, and stepped forward into the fire.

Beth5572 - Well, here you go.

Crystal Cat-chan – You have hit on one of the biggest problems in this story idea. It’s part of why I will at the very least be taking a break between this and the next story, if it even gets written at all. I have to decide exactly how Lucius would deal with all this. He’s very frustrated right now, and wants to lash out at everyone, but if he does so, it only puts him in an even more untenable position. I’m still unsure of whether or not he would decide to get even with Arthur Weasley next year for “taking away his son,” by giving Ginny the diary. I go back and forth about it a lot. I can’t see him giving up what he thinks is a powerful child, let alone a powerful child he has raised to be loyal to him, but I also have a difficult time seeing him go against his master. Rather goes against his programming. So I’m not sure what I’d do. I’m so glad you’re enjoying the story, and I only hope I do the rest of it justice.

Bahzad – Thank you. Yes, even more emotion here.

Dimensional Analysis – Thanks

Flower Kid – Thank you. I’m rather fond of it. I hope you’ll keep reading.

28

The Man With Two Faces

The chamber that Orion entered was huge, but he paid no attention to his surroundings, his gaze was instead immediately drawn to the figure standing in the centre of the room, examining the largest mirror he had ever seen. Quirrell. Even knowing that it would be his Defense teacher he would meet in this room, he was still unable to keep himself from gasping at the man's now sure frame, or at the pain that hit him almost the moment the man came into view.

It was almost as though Quirrell had been pretending to be something he wasn't all year. Where was the small, trembling man who had taught Defense classes as though he were afraid that his students would use the spells he taught against him? This man's frame was straight, and his hands steady as he ran them across the mirrored glass. He was muttering to himself, but stopped and turned when he heard Orion's gasp.

The pain faded a bit when the man turned, but Orion still felt the throb along his forehead as the man watched him. Cold eyes examined him for several minutes, and a whispering sound Orion couldn't quite extract meaning from filled the room. Then Quirrell's mouth quirked up in a very sinister smile. Orion withheld a shudder just barely, and met his teacher's gaze directly.

"Mister Malfoy, what is a first-year Slytherin doing so far out of bounds at this time of night? Surely your Head of House taught you better."

"Professor Snape has taught me a lot of things. One of the most important is that it's not nice to steal, *sir*." Orion was pleased to hear that his voice came out perfectly calm, if a touch angry.

Quirrell sneered. "Yes, he is a bit…over-principled…is he not? But then he would hardly be a teacher if he were not. Surely, Mister Malfoy, your father has taught you that right and wrong are simply concepts, and hold no true place in real life? That in truth, there is really only power, and those too weak to seek it?"

Orion glowered. “I’ve learned a few lessons from my father over the years, but I’ve learned some of the most important lessons this year. Like family is more important than many things, but that doesn’t mean that it is the only thing. And also, that sometimes adults see fit to…alter the truth to their liking.”

“Truth. You are aware, Mister Malfoy, that truth is a rather elastic thing, are you not?”

“Only in the hands of people like you.”

“Are you saying your father is like me?” Quirrell smiled mockingly.

“I didn’t say that.”

“Let’s try this again, Mister Malfoy. Why are you here?”

“I'm here to stop you,” Orion glared at his professor. “Whatever you want that stone for, it can't be worth it.”

Quirrell sneered. “And what stone might that be?”

“The stone that you came here to steal. The stone that Professor Dumbledore and the other teachers have been guarding here all year.”

“I’m a teacher at this school as well, Mister Malfoy. What makes you think I'm here to steal anything?”

“Because they aren’t here and you are. Besides, why else would you have gone to all the trouble to get this far?”

Quirrell’s eyes narrowed. “You seem to know so much about me, Malfoy...have you been spying on me?”

Orion smiled slightly. “Spying is such an impolite term, sir. Let's just say I was...aware of you.”

Quirrell scowled. “Well, I suppose I'll have to learn to be more discrete in the future.”

Orion snorted. “Discrete. You mean, like letting in fewer trolls? Not going up against my Head-of-house? Not playing the fool all year? That kind of discrete?”

Another smile hovered on Quirrell’s lips. “Well, well, well, you seem to have seen through me, Malfoy. I commend you on your abilities.”

“You commend me for being a Slytherin?” Orion sneered.

Quirrell laughed lightly at this. “Of course not. I commend you for being your father's son.”

Orion scowled at that. “My father has *nothing* to do with this.”

Quirrell’s head tilted to the side. “Doesn't he, Mister Malfoy?”

Orion continued to scowl, but refused to respond. This was getting them nowhere.

The whispering picked up again, and Quirrell went still, his eyes growing wider as the whispering continued. Finally the sound faded, and Quirrell’s gaze caught his once more. “I suppose, Mister Malfoy, that you know the secret behind this mirror? How to get to the stone?

Orion laughed, but it was a sullen sound, and fooled neither of them. “And why should I know that? I only came down here to keep you from taking the stone.”

Quirrell smiled a slow, sinister smile that crept across his face like a crack upon a window-pane. "I think you do know how to get the stone, Mister Malfoy. And you will help me to retrieve it.” Then the smile was gone, and his eyes glowed. “Come here now, boy!" he said in a ringing voice.

Orion pulled up his chin and glowered at the man. “Why should I? You're not my head-of-house, you're not the headmaster, and you're not my father. Why should I do anything you want of me?”

Quirrell’s mouth thinned in anger, but the whispering started once more, and he stood silent as it surrounded them both. Orion strained to understand the words, but they stayed just below his level of

hearing. When the whispering stopped, that horrible smile returned to Quirrell's face. "What if I asked you to do it for your father, would you?" he asked, while tilting his head thoughtfully to one side.

Orion looked at him as though he were mad. "And why would father want me to do something like that? It's a waste of my time, and if there's anything he has taught me, it's never to waste my time."

The whispering returned, and this time he could almost make out the words, but it stopped before he was fully able to understand it. And this time, Quirrell's smile looked triumphant as he walked up the stairs to join Orion where he stood. Orion backed up, only to feel the heat of the flames from the last room warm his back. He was trapped. That horrible smile was still there, and Quirrell leaned down to whisper, "I was thinking more along the lines of James Potter..." before straightening back up, smirking broadly down at him, then descending the stairs to stand in front of the mirror once more.

Orion worked at breathing and responding normally, as though what Quirrell said had not terrified him completely. "And why would I care what James Potter thought?"

Quirrell wasn't looking at him when he responded. "Why would you care about your father? Well, I was thinking you might want to see him again. If you help me, I can make that happen."

Orion deliberately misinterpreted these words. It was easier than responding to them. And safer. "I have seen my father plenty this year, and will be seeing him in just a few months. I hardly need your help to do so."

He could see Quirrell's eyes narrow at this response. "Mister Malfoy, you purposefully misunderstand me. I am not talking about the man who helped murder your blood parents and then took you for his own. After all, he serves the same master that I do, does he not?"

Orion stuck out his chin. "My father serves no one but his own interests."

Then the whispering was back, but this time, Orion was able to make out the words, and his blood froze. "Your father's interests were in

serving me, boy, until he set eyes on you after my disappearance." Orion's eyes widened. Quirrell's mouth had not moved. Voldemort was here. And somehow, he knew Orion's true identity. Firenze had been right.

Orion tried not to dwell on the meaning of Voldemort's words. Surely he was bluffing. "Are you such a coward that you cannot even face me, ghost? Because the world believes you dead. Therefore you must be a ghost. And I know for a fact that ghosts can't affect the living."

"Ah, but I am not a ghost, boy. Quirrell! Show the boy."

"Master, surely…" Qurrell's voice was tremulous, the man once more becoming the teacher he had known all year.

"It was not a request, Quirrell," the harsh whispering voice said.

Quirrell shuddered, but turned so his back faced the mirror, and the pain Orion was feeling flared once more as he watched Quirrell reach up to unwrap the turban from his head. What was he up to now? Maybe Orion could look for the stone while Quirrell was distracted? And then Orion saw why Quirrell was unwrapping his head. Reflected in the mirror, he could see what the turban had been covering. His head had not a hair on it. Instead, there was a face. The most terrifying face Orion had ever seen. Lidless red eyes and slits for a nose. It looked almost reptilian. He couldn't quite hold back the whimper that the sight caused.

"Yes, you understand now, don't you—Harry Potter," the face said.

Orion stood fast, but inside he could barely manage more than a thought. He was going to die. And he was alone. He sent a quick apology to Draco, then growled, "I'm not Harry Potter. My name is Orion Malfoy."

The face's eyes narrowed, but the lips curved into the mockery of a smile. "But I can see the resemblance so clearly...you're just as headstrong and stupid as your parents were."

“I suppose father was a bit stupid when he was young. Offering allegiance to any idiot who came along...But mother's only mistake was marrying him.”

The smile faded with Orion’s words. “Now, now Potter, that is no way to speak of the man who raised you. Not after he helped me kill your parents.”

Orion gritted his teeth. “My name is Orion. And I'll speak of father however I wish. Besides, you have no proof Lucius was anywhere near the Potters the night you murdered them all.”

“Quirrell, I wish to see him properly.” Quirrell turned obediently at this command, and Orion was unable to keep from falling to his knees in pain.

“I won't let you do this,” he managed to gasp, but the face simply laughed.

“Do you really think you have the power to stop me?” He waited, but Orion was unable to respond, so Voldemort taunted him again. “Exactly what do you propose to do about it, boy?”

This time, Orion managed to climb to his feet. “All I have to do is keep you from getting to the stone until Professor Snape or Dumbledore get here. I think I'm more than up to that task,” he said in a trembling voice.

Voldemort smiled broadly at this failed show of strength. “So like your father. Then again, perhaps you are up to the task. I always sensed great power in you that was never properly tapped. Lucius really never realized your full potential, did he? Too worried he might turn you into me. And then where would he be?”

Orion scowled at him. “I think Father's trained me better than you might think.”

“True, Lucius did a passable job turning you into a carbon-copy of Draco as well. You do bear a great resemblance to him. Though you are not so like him in your personality, now, are you?”

“Few twins are identical.”

“But then you’re not really twins, so why should you be?” Orion scowled, but Voldemort continued to taunt him. “I know that he wanted to join you down here. It’s too bad he didn’t. It might have been interesting to meet him as well.”

“I'm glad you couldn't,” Orion said through pain-clenched teeth. “He wasn't ready to face you. But I am.”

“Are you now?” the leering face smirked. “But Draco has so much potential. I’m sure our conversation would have been fascinating.”

“Draco has a great deal of potential.” Orion closed his eyes, remembering the fierce look on Draco’s face before they’d parted in the last room. He was glad he hadn’t been able to come. Draco would have just been one more thing for Voldemort to use against him. He opened his eyes and met the red gaze. “He’s a great person. I'm proud to call him my brother.”

Voldemort looked appraisingly at him for a moment before responding. “He does seem to have a great deal of anger inside him. He might do well to tap into that more often.”

Orion glowered at him. “He'd do better without anger. He's a strong person. He doesn't need anger to make him that way.”

Voldemort smiled slowly at this, his eyes slitting even more. Oh, but anger is a good asset; you'd do well to remember that.”

Orion shook his head. “No, anger only causes one to lose control. It doesn't make one more powerful, or better.”

The face’s smile broadened. “You will have to remember that for yourself when the time comes that you and your brother find yourself on opposite sides of the fight. Draco is sure to follow in his father's footsteps, and you seem so determined to fight against me…”

“That won't happen. Draco loves me. He would never fight me. He knows what’s right, and he’ll fight on my side.”

“Are you so sure of that? One never can tell what will come with time.”

“I know Draco better than you do.”

Voldemort seemed especially pleased at this. “And how can you know him when you do not even know who you really are?”

“I know enough,” Orion’s voice was stronger now. The pain hadn’t faded, but he’d grown used to it, and he would not let Voldemort see him weak. “He has been my friend for my whole life. We’d never desert each other. No matter what.”

Suddenly Voldemort’s face looked concerned, and Orion knew he would not like what the man would have to say next. “But what if something bad were to happen to Draco? That would be a terrible shame.”

His response to this was quick. “Lucius would never let anything happen to Draco. He loves him.”

“But Lucius may not have a say in the matter.”

“Lucius has never let anyone tell him what to do before. Why should he start now, when the life of his son was on the line?” Orion growled.

“Ah, but it might be difficult for Lucius to protect the boy if he were dead as well,” the face leered at him. “After all, I killed your first set of parents. What’s to stop me from killing my errant servant as well?”

Orion’s fist tightened around his wand, shaking at the implication. He might be angry with Lucius, but he didn’t want him dead. As upset as he was, the man had still raised him. “I won't let you hurt them, or anyone else,” he ground out.

“But why does that make you so upset?” Voldemort asked, frowning as though he’d simply offered to help Orion with a bit of homework. “After all, it should hardly matter to you what I do to my servants. You could be a little more grateful, after all.”

“Grateful?” Orion asked, barely able to contain his anger at this creature who wanted to deny him everything in life.

“Well, I’m only offering to rid you of the man who has hurt you so. After all, he allowed me to hurt you; to kill your parents… You should want him dead, Potter.”

“Don’t call me that!” Orion shouted, pointing his wand at Voldemort. “And don't even pretend to know what I want. Lucius certainly doesn’t, so why should you?” He took a deep breath, lowering his wand, and met Voldemort’s eyes. “And don’t think you can use me. I'm no one's pawn,” he said. “I know you for what you are, and I won’t let you use me that way. Besides, threatening my family isn't getting you that stone any faster, and it's wasting your time.”

Voldemort sighed as though Orion had disappointed him. “But there is such a sense of satisfaction in it. Especially when the potential for fruition is there,” he smiled.

Orion smiled back. “And I'm sure you'll find it completely fulfilling when the headmaster arrives and keeps you from the one thing you need to regain power.”

Voldemort’s eyes narrowed, and his smile became a scowl. “I grow tired of this mindless banter, Potter. Now come here now and show me what you see in the mirror!”

“I won't,” Orion said calmly. “I'm fine right where I am.”

The face twisted into a scowl. “Quirrell! Do not just stand there like the half-wit you normally are!” he shouted. Quirrell turned around and pointed his wand at Orion. He muttered something too soft for Orion to understand, but he soon understood what it was meant to do as his feet began to move of their own volition. Orion closed his eyes. This may not have been what Lucius had meant for him to use his training for, but damned if he was going to be another of Voldemort’s victims.

He reached into the well of power that Lucius had shown him how to tap, and used it to shatter the spell around him. Unfortunately, the momentum of the spell had brought him to the edge of the stairs, and he soon found himself stumbling down them, only able to alter his

trajectory so that he did not land at Quirrell’s feet. Once he had come to a stop, he jumped to his feet. “I won't let you use me,” he said, his eyes narrowed.

Quirrell's face grew red, and he pointed his wand at Orion once more. "Wingardium Leviosa," he bellowed. Orion was much quicker this time, and broke free of this spell before he was more than an inch off the ground.

Then, to be sure Quirrell couldn’t attempt anything further, he cast a quick shield spell. It was the first time he’d done it, and he could feel it wouldn’t last long, but he was confident he would be able to re-cast it if needed. “I told you. I won’t do it,” he said calmly.

Quirrell screamed in frustration, and Voldemort’s curses of his servant weren’t far behind. “Let me see him,” he hissed at Quirrell. Quirrell turned back towards the mirror, allowing Voldemort to face Orion. “You will help me, boy. Whether you wish to or not,” he growled.

But Orion was completely calm now. “I told you, Voldemort. I won’t let you use me.”

Voldemort’s scowl twisted into bitter rage at this, and he hissed something at Quirrell under his breath that Orion couldn’t hear. Before he realized what had happened, Quirrell hit him with another spell, and his body screamed with pain. He was unable to do more than writhe and scream for several minutes while his teacher held his wand on him. When he broke the spell, Orion was left panting and weak, his wand lost in his struggle to free himself from the pain.

He saw Quirrell move to cast another spell, and couldn’t help but flinch in fear. But the spell Quirrell cast was not on him, but on the huge mirror. He levitated it so that it glided across the room, and landed directly in front of him.

Voldemort’s hissing voice filled his ears once more. “What do you see in the mirror, you stupid boy?”

Orion had tried to avoid the mirror when Quirrell had placed it in front of him. He knew that whatever it was, it was obviously the last task

for finding the stone. And there was no way he wanted to help Voldemort get the stone. Unfortunately, though he had managed to look away quickly, the single glance had shown him something he couldn't resist looking at again.

When he turned back to the mirror, he was mesmerized by what he saw. There, in the mirror, in exactly the same position as himself, but where Orion's eyes were aquamarine, this boy's were the bright green of summer leaves. His hair was shorter than Orion's, and the thick, unkempt locks were raven-black. And on his forehead, the now-familiar scar. Was this…him? As he should look? And then the other boy smiled, and held up a blood-red stone, dropping it into his pocket. The moment the stone disappeared from view, Orion felt something fall into his own pocket. Could it really be that easy? Did he really have the Philosopher's stone?

Managing to keep this astonishing fact to himself, he focused instead upon his true face. He knew that Voldemort expected an answer, so he said in wonder, "It's me...but I look different."

Voldemort wasn't satisfied with this answer, and Quirrell took a few shuffling steps towards Orion so that Voldemort could tower over him. "Do you see the stone?" he hissed.

Orion knew that his best bet was to continue focusing on what he was seeing, and thereby distracting Voldemort from examining him too closely. "Is that what I'm supposed to look like?" he said with quiet awe. "I...I look just like...just like him! Like James Potter."

But Voldemort was not to be deterred. "The stone you blithering boy!"

Orion continued, as though he hadn't heard. "And my eyes...they're green."

"The stone," Voldemort growled. "What about the stone? Is it there?"

Orion cocked his head, continuing his examination of his other self. "My mother's eyes were green, weren't they?" he said, musingly.

Voldemort snarled at this babbling, and growled, "Quirrell, remind him why he is here!"

Quirrell turned around and cracked Orion over the head with his wand. “Answer him boy!” he snarled.

Orion cried out at the blow, then turned to look at Voldemort. “You wanted me to look, and I looked. I see myself. Myself as I should be.”

Voldemort’s scowl turned to astonishment when the boy turned. The boy’s eyes, which had been an aquamarine blue only the moment before, had changed colour. “Your eyes, Potter…they've turned green!”

But Orion didn’t hear these words. He might have been Harry Potter once, but he was something else now, and not even Voldemort would be able to deny him it. He felt the power building inside him, as he hissed, “I told you-I'm Orion Malfoy!”

Quirrell turned, and seeing the halo of energies around the boy, trembled. “Master, what has happened?”

Voldemort hissed, “Ignore him. He is but a child. Turn around!” The trembling man did so, and Orion found himself face-to-face with Voldemort once more. He rose to his feet, and met those red eyes head-on. Voldemort was hissing at him once more. “Did you see the stone or not, boy? I do not care about the boy you saw.”

Orion stepped towards him. “All I saw was myself and a delusional madman bent on destroying our world.” And then he smiled. “And you'd better deal with me soon, because I hear them coming.” It was true. He could hear the sound of footsteps sound in the next room, though he was unsure if the sounds were anything more than wishful thinking on his part until he saw Quirrell’s face turn towards the doorway.

“Master,” Quirrell cried, “what do I do?”

“Grab the boy!” Voldemort hissed, and Quirrell turned quickly and wrapped a hand around the boy's wrist, then dropped it immediately, clutching his hand to his chest and backing away from the boy. “Master, it burns! What has he done? What is he?” he shrieked.

And sure enough, Orion could see blisters beginning to appear on the hand that Quirrell had grabbed him with.

Voldemort howled, “Grab him!” and Quirrell made another attempt to snatch at him, but this time, Orion was ready, and he ducked under Quirrell’s reaching arms, around him, and back up the stairs just as Snape and Dumbledore burst into the room.

“No!” Voldemort shrieked, but it was already too late. “Come back here, boy!” he snarled as Orion cowered behind Snape.

But Dumbledore stepped forward to meet him. “I don’t think so, Tom,” he said calmly. “Severus, take Orion and his friends up to the Hospital Wing, please?” His gaze never wavered from the face on the back of Quirrell’s head. “Truly ingenious, Tom. I knew Quirrell was under your direction, but I had no idea you would be so clever as to use him to sneak into the school right under my nose. But I’m afraid I can’t allow you the use of his body any longer.”

Orion could feel Snape tugging on him to take him from the room, but he found himself transfixed by what was going on between these two powerful wizards. Voldemort’s red eyes were mad, and wild with fury.

“I will not let you take this from me,” he hissed at Dumbledore, and Orion saw Quirrell’s blistered hands raise to aim his wand at Dumbledore.

But Dumbledore’s aim was sure, and with a quick, “Expelliarmus,” Quirrell’s wand shot from his grasp and landed in Dumbledore’s outstretched hand. “Let him go, Tom. You cannot have the stone. He is of no more use to you.”

Voldemort’s hissing curses twisted his face into a horrifying leer. “This is not over, Dumbledore! I will be back, and I will not forget what I have seen!” For a moment those red eyes lingered on Snape, and Orion could feel the man shake through the hand that held his shoulder.

Then the face sank into the back of Quirrell’s skull, and the man began to shriek. “Severus,” Dumbledore shouted as he descended the staircase rapidly, “get him out of here!” But before they could

move so much as an inch, the screaming man collapsed, and Orion could see…something rise from the body. A smoky shape shot through the room towards him, slipping through his body as though he were nothing more than air, leaving fiery pain coursing in its wake.

He gasped, and would have fallen but for Snape's grasp on his shoulder. Snape felt him collapsing, and scooped him up, hurrying towards the exit as Orion felt himself fall into darkness.

When he woke, the first thing he saw was a pale, pointed, and horribly worried face. "Ori?" Draco asked, and Orion could hear that his brother had been crying at one point, as his voice was rough and lower than usual.

"Hey, Drake," he managed in a hoarse whisper. "What happened? Is everyone okay?"

Draco scrubbed at his face, and Orion realized he saw a few tears lingering there. "They're okay. Ron's across the room, sleeping. He had a slight concussion, but Madam Pomfrey says he'll be okay. Snape sent the rest to their dorms. But I refused to leave until you woke," he smiled waveringly.

And then a familiar voice said, "And now he has, Draco, and it is time for you to return to your dorm as well." Both boys looked up to see Dumbledore smiling down at them. "I am sure that Poppy will be more than willing to let you visit your brother in the morning. But it is late, and you need your rest."

Draco looked mutinous for a moment, but finally nodded. "Yes, headmaster." He turned to Orion. "I'll come up as soon as I'm awake, okay?"

Orion smiled, and Draco stood and left the room, glancing back once, as though to make sure Orion was truly awake. Then, with a smile, he was gone. Orion turned back to the headmaster.

"How are you feeling, Orion?"

He shrugged. "I'm fine."

The headmaster smiled. “That was quite an adventure you and your friends had. I must thank you for acting so quickly. Had you not, I’m sure eventually Quirrell would have found a way around even my little test.”

“What was that mirror, sir?” Orion couldn’t help but ask.

“That, Orion, was the Mirror of Erised. It is a very tricky mirror.”

“It…It showed me how I should really look.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Yes. That is its power. To show you that which you most desire in the world. And what you currently desire most, Orion, is to understand who you truly are.”

“But how was it that I ended up with the stone, sir?”

“Ah, now, I'm glad you asked me that. It was one of my more brilliant ideas, and between you and me, that's saying something. You see, only one who wanted to find the Stone—find it, but not use it—would be able to get it, otherwise they'd just see themselves making gold or drinking Elixir of Life. My brain surprises even me sometimes…” he chuckled.

“I see, sir.” He felt inside his pocket to see if the stone was still there, and when he felt it, he pulled it out to look at it. The darkly glittering stone looked well-polished, but a bit worn, and only very roughly cut. He could imagine his mother sneering at it, saying how it was obviously of inferior quality, and don’t they have any emeralds? “It doesn’t look like much, to be honest,” he finally said.

“Ah, but I’m sure you’ve learned by now, Orion, that what things seem to be, and what they are, is two very different things.”

Orion nodded, then held the stone out to Dumbledore. “So I suppose you’ll go hide it somewhere else now?”

Dumbledore shook his head as he took the stone. “No. I’m afraid this stone has outlived its usefulness. While it still exists, Voldemort will continue his attempts to obtain it, and that we simply cannot allow,” he said sadly. “No, we will be destroying it tonight. Professors Flitwick

and McGonagall are preparing the proper spells as we speak. When you wake tomorrow morning, it will have ceased to exist."

Orion looked at him, horrified. "But what will happen to Nicholas Flamel? Surely he needs the stone to survive, doesn't he?"

"Ah, you surprise me again, Orion. So, you and your friends found out about Nicholas, did you?" He smiled wider. "Yes, Orion, Nicholas and Pernelle do need the stone to survive. But they have been alive a very long time, and after a while, life becomes less interesting than what awaits in the hereafter. After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure."

Orion looked at him oddly, then shrugged. "If you say so, sir." He was quiet for a moment, and Dumbledore busied himself by cleaning his spectacles. Finally, Orion looked up at the headmaster. "Sir, might I ask a few more questions?"

Dumbledore sighed. "Ah, Orion, surely you have learned that a little knowledge can be more terrible than we expect?" He looked down at the boy, who was still quite pale from the attack of Voldemort's spirit and nodded. "I will do my best to answer your questions, Orion. But understand, there are some things you are better off not knowing. At least not yet."

Orion took a deep breath. "I suppose so, sir."

Dumbledore nodded. "Then ask away."

"Well," he said quietly, "I suppose the first thing I'd like to know is why Quirrell couldn't touch me. When he tried, his skin started to blister."

Dumbledore looked surprised at this, then thought for a moment. "Well, Orion, I cannot answer for sure. I would imagine that no one really knows. But I think, having known James and Lily Potter as I did, that it is possible that their sacrifice is what saved your life that night. Their love is what kept Voldemort from killing you. That love still exists within you, and still protects you. Quirrell, who served Voldemort, and had him literally under his skin, was unable to even bear the thought of such love, let alone the touch of it. So, when he tried to touch you, the Potters' love kept you safe."

Orion felt surprised at this. He had never imagined that some part of his true parents remained with him. And that they could still protect him after being gone for ten years… He smiled. It was a nice thought. But there was still one thing that bothered him. He had hoped that Dumbledore might bring it up before now, but as he hadn't, the burden lay on Orion's shoulders. "One more question, headmaster."

"Yes, Orion?"

Orion looked up to meet Dumbledore's gaze. "Why me?" Dumbledore looked blankly at him, and he knew that the headmaster wouldn't explain anything without his explicit question. "Why did Voldemort come after my parents and I when I was a baby?"

A thoughtful look flashed across the headmaster's face, and was gone, replaced by a more sombre expression. "Ah, Orion, I have to apologize. This question I am afraid I cannot answer. Not today. Someday, perhaps. When you are a bit older. When you need to know. I promise you you will."

Then Dumbledore smiled. "And now, Orion, I shall take my leave of you, before Madam Pomfrey chases me from the room for over-taxing one of her patients."

Orion nodded, and watched the man turn and leave. Though the headmaster's explanations had filled in some of the gaps in his knowledge, they were far from complete. There was still so much he didn't know. And what was it that the headmaster was keeping from him? But before he could solve this puzzle, he slid into sleep, and didn't wake until morning.

Pimpilidimpi – Thanks. Second to the last! What do you think?

Crystal Cat-chan – I thought so, too, but now I'm starting to wonder if that's not too predictable. I mean, with so many extra characters running around, maybe he tries to, but it ends up with someone else? I don't think that Lucius will have a good end in this series, no matter how hard I try to get him to reform. He does love his sons, but in a "that's mine" sort of way, and if told by Voldemort to turn Orion over to him, he'd struggle with it, but he's got this little tattoo, see… ;) I just

see him siding against Ori when it comes right down to it. As much as he cares for him, he's also more likely to choose his own hide over Orion's. I'm glad you like the changes I've made with the characters. I really wanted this to be a more mixed idea, and many of the themes and connections I've created in this piece have been with me since I started reading the series. I mean, the first time they landed in the Devil's Snare, I couldn't understand why she didn't have Neville there to begin with. When the next "Book" is written, they will be adding at least two more characters to their little group. I liked the way I could actually split up the characters into sub-groups, and have each discover certain parts of the over-all plot. It helped things along, and made it less of a carbon-copy than other First-year AU fics I've read. I hope you liked the confrontation. I had fun writing it.

Beth5572 – Thanks. Here's the next bit.

Alen – I was actually thinking that myself. I have found that the stuff that worked best in this story is when my group took another route to get to the same place. :) Glad you're enjoying it.

29

Going Home

Orion woke the next morning to the sound of raised voices. One unfamiliar, but one chillingly familiar.

“If your sons have hurt my boy, Malfoy, you will pay!” the first voice said, sounding heavy with worry and anger.

A very familiar, sneering drawl responded. “Weasley, I am quite certain that nothing my sons did had anything to do with your boy’s injury. Most likely he turned the wrong way and walked into a wall. He hardly seems to have the brains to know which direction he is turning, let alone how to defer to his betters. Tell me, Weasley, what did you teach those children of yours?”

Orion sat up quickly, propping himself against the pillows and looked across the room to where Ron was also sitting up and looking a bit wide-eyed at their fathers’ upraised voices. They silently agreed to continue listening, to see how far the two men would go.

Lucius was now sneering, “…After all, Weasley, I suppose not everyone can afford the best in education for their children. Of course, perhaps if you hadn’t had so many, you might have had enough to raise them properly.”

“Listen, Malfoy, you were a snotty little brat when I first met you, and you’re still a snotty little brat. Just an aging one,” Mister Weasley growled.

“As I recall, Weasley, you were one of the most antagonistic Head Boys in all my years at Hogwarts. And you seem to hardly have changed. You really should learn to control your temper a bit better.”

“You’ll pay for that, Malfoy!” There was the sound of scuffling in the hall, but before either of the boys could so much as get up from their beds, another voice sounded.

“Mister Malfoy, Mister Weasley!” McGonagall sounded as though she were about to take points, and both boys sank hurriedly back into

their pillows as she continued to berate them. “Perhaps the two of you could take a page from your sons’ books. Aside from a few scuffles early on, they have managed to get along this entire year. Do you honestly expect me to believe your sons are more mature than two men with responsibilities and families? Perhaps you could use a detention to remind you how to act when in public?”

“Minerva…” Ron’s father said, but he was interrupted by Lucius.

“I was simply going to see my son, Minerva, when Weasley here felt the need to accost me. I was doing no more than defending myself,” he said coolly.

“I don’t care what you were doing, Mister Malfoy. The fact that you were fighting with him rather than going to see your son reflects badly on you. I suggest you ignore each other while you visit your sons, and that you leave more quietly than you arrived, or I will see to it that you are barred from visiting your children for at least the next year.”

There was an exaggerated sniff from Lucius and a “Yes, Minerva,” from Ron’s father, and then the doors opened, and both men entered. Ron’s father was a thin man, going bald, but the little hair he had was as red as Ron’s, and his eyes seemed more worried than angry as they searched for his son. The two men glared at each other once more before descending on their sons.

Orion and Ron shared one last exasperated glance before their fathers took their attention.

Lucius was glowering down at Orion, his lips in a thin line. “And what, exactly, did you think you were doing, leading your brother and your friends on such a foolhardy mission, Orion?” Lucius hissed at him.

Orion had been so distracted at hearing the two men argue, that he had completely forgotten to wonder how Lucius would react to what he and his friends had done. He looked up at Lucius now and wondered what exactly he should tell him. “Well…”

“Don’t bother spouting whatever nonsense you were planning on telling me. It’s quite obvious to me that you weren’t thinking at all, or

you never would have done something so incredibly impulsive. Tell me, boy, did nothing I taught you as a child sink in?"

Orion looked up at Lucius, unsure how to respond in a way that would not upset the man more. He recalled a time when he had always been the favoured child, the one who Lucius never had a harsh word for, but this year had proved that such things were fleeting at best. He wished he could have that old Lucius back.

"Well? I'm waiting, Orion. What made you think that it was a good idea to place yourself and others in such jeopardy? One would think you were a Gryffindor. I'm beginning to wonder why the hat hadn't placed you there," Lucius sneered.

When Lucius had approached, Orion had felt his mouth dry and his throat close. He had always hated it when Lucius was in a temper, though before this year, it had rarely been spent on him. Now, though, it seemed as though every time he saw Lucius, one or both of them were furious with the other. He missed being able to adore Lucius, but at his accusation of being a Gryffindor, Orion couldn't help but bristle. "And if I had been, Lucius? After all we both know I have more connections to that house than to Slytherin," he hissed in a low voice.

Pale blue eyes narrowed. "And would you have preferred I'd left you to your fate, boy? No home, no family, no future?"

Before Orion could respond, Draco entered the room, and seeing the tense looks on his father and brother's faces moved between them. "Hello, father. You look well." He said in greeting, as though they were having no more than a friendly chat. He turned to Orion. "And you look better." Orion saw a strange look pass across Draco's face. "Orion…" He turned to Lucius. "Did you do something to the spells on him, father?"

Lucius sneered. "What in Merlin's name are you on about, Draco?" He looked down at Orion's face, and saw the green eyes gazing back at him for the first time since he had taken the boy from his parents' demolished home. "Stupid boy," he hissed quietly. He pulled out his wand, and both boys flinched. "Hold still. I will not hurt you, but this must be done, Orion," he said in a quiet voice. He muttered an incantation, the wand pointed directly at Orion's eyes. There was a

silver glow, and for a moment the eyes seemed bluer once more, but when the glow had faded, the eyes returned to their reclaimed emerald green once more.

Lucius's glower became deadly then. "What have you done, boy?" he said, barely opening his lips, his teeth clenched, the words a mere hiss of breath.

Bright green eyes met pale blue. "I didn't do anything, father. It must have happened when I looked into the mirror."

"Mirror? Mirrors don't cause this kind of change, Orion. I don't know what you have done, but rest assured that we will find a way to fix this…" he broke off at that point as Ron and his father moved across the room towards the hospital doors. "Meddling fool," Lucius spat under his breath.

Orion and Draco both looked at each other, and decided that this could very well be their only chance to meet Ron's father, even if it weren't under the best of circumstances. "Ron," Orion called out before the two had reached the doors.

Ron turned, though his father seemed intent on ignoring them. Orion got out of bed, and he and Draco moved to Ron's side. Mister Weasley was glowering now, but Orion stuck his hand out to Mister Weasley. "You must be Ron's father. I'm Orion, sir. It's good to meet you. Ron talks about you all the time. How great a father you are," he smiled as Lucius glowered at him from the other side of the room.

Mister Weasley raised an eyebrow at this, slightly taken aback that two Malfoys at least seemed willing to be friendly. When Draco repeated his brother's gesture after Mister Weasley had shook Orion's hand, the man smiled. "Well, it's good to know that children can learn good manners in spite of their parents," he mused.

Lucius approached his sons, and placed hands on each of their shoulders. "Yes, Weasley. Gives you hope for your children, doesn't it?" he sneered.

Orion turned to his father. "Don't start again, father. Draco and I would like at least one visit next year, after all," he said warningly.

Lucius scowled at this, but said no more, and Ron, obviously deciding that discretion was indeed the better part of valour, said, “Well, dad and I should be getting on to the tower. I’m sure the others will want to see him before he leaves.”

Mister Weasley nodded. “Good to meet you two,” he smiled, then they both turned towards the door and left the Hospital wing.

Lucius scowled after them. “I do not know why the two of you insist on hanging out with that boy. He and his father are worthless, and well beneath you. You should be focusing on making proper friends in Slytherin.”

Draco scoffed at this. “We have friends in Slytherin, father. Vince and Greg. We surely don’t need to restrict ourselves entirely to Slytherins, do we?”

Lucius relented. “Perhaps not. But Gryffindors? I mean, really. They’re so…uncivilized. It’s a wonder they even let them into this school. I swear, the standards here slipped when Armando Dippet left.”

Orion and Draco rolled their eyes. “If you say so, father,” Draco grinned.

Once Lucius was assured that Orion and Draco were indeed well, and they had promised him they had learned their lesson and would not be repeating it, he returned to the Manor, promising them that if they got into any more trouble before the end of the year, that they would not be allowed to leave the Manor until the end of August.

When he was gone, Draco led Orion to their meeting room, where the others all listened avidly as Orion described what had happened when he had finally found Quirrell. Draco and the others had already told Vince and Greg what had happened up to the potions room, and Ron appeared shortly before Orion told the rest about what he had seen in the mirror, and how he had managed to distract Voldemort enough to give Snape and Dumbledore time to arrive.

Hermione asked dozens of questions until even Neville complained that she was ruining the story, and so she kept quiet until Orion had finally finished.

“So, it really was Quirrell,” she finally sighed. “But why did Dumbledore hire him in the first place, if he knew that Quirrell served Voldemort? I mean, he put the whole school in danger by doing that.”

Orion shrugged. “Don’t know. Maybe he felt that he could reach him better if he were a teacher here than out in the world somewhere causing who knows what kind of damage.”

“Or,” Draco said, “maybe he thought he could watch him better here? And lull him into a false sense of security by making him think he had no idea of his allegiances? In hopes that he might spill some important information?”

Orion shrugged at this. “Who knows why Dumbledore does anything?”

They were all silent for a bit before Neville chimed in with another question. “Do you think Professor Quirrell is dead?” he asked tremulously.

Orion thought back to the way the man had collapsed when Voldemort had fled his body, and how silent he had suddenly been. “I don’t know, Nev. Dumbledore didn’t say. I guess we’ll find out next year, huh?”

Draco looked at his brother curiously. “What do you mean by that, Ori?”

“Well, if he’s still our teacher next year, he survived, didn’t he?” he said smugly.

But Hermione sneered at that. “Orion, he may have had his reasons for letting Quirrell teach us this year, but I’m quite certain, now that he’s placed students in danger, that he will hardly be allowed to teach here again if he has survived.”

Ron nodded. “Yeah, Dumbledore may be a nutter, but even he’s not that crazy.”

After that, their conversation slowly turned to their upcoming exams. Hermione was insistent that they would fail as they had already wasted several days dealing with the “Quirrell situation” as she put it. The boys all shook their heads at this, but agreed that it was probably time to begin studying as the exams were in less than a month.

That night, though, they received a rather large shock. The Slytherins and Gryffindors still treated their little group as pariahs after the point-taking incident, and so they had to sit at the front of the hall, and were therefore the first to hear Dumbledore clear his throat to catch the attention of the school’s students. He stood, and soon the entire hall was utterly silent. He cleared his throat once more, and began to speak.

“Last evening, several of the students in this hall distinguished themselves in a way that I would like to acknowledge in front of all of you, so that you will know them for what they truly are: heroes. They prevented someone from taking something that may have resulted in a horrible fate for all of us. I would like to ask Misters Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle from Slytherin, and Miss Granger and her fellow first years from Gryffindor, Mister Weasley and Mister Longbottom to please stand?”

The seven students all stood, overly aware of the attention of the entire school focused on them. Dumbledore smiled down at them. “These seven students deserve our thanks, and I believe we should do so as a school before I continue.” And with that, Dumbledore began to clap, the teachers quickly following his example, and soon the whole school was clapping, though with bemused looks on their faces.

When the clapping stopped, Dumbledore nodded. “Now, as to rewarding these courageous students: to Misters Crabbe and Goyle, I would like to award ten points each for loyalty in the face of danger, and another five to mister Goyle for clever use of charms.” The two boy’s eyes grew round, and Greg’s face flushed. Neither of them had ever earned so much as a point for Slytherin, and they were actually

quite used to losing them for their carelessness in classes. Draco and Orion grinned and pounded their friends on their backs in congratulations.

But Dumbledore had only begun. “To Mister Longbottom, I award fifteen points for quick thinking in a dangerous situation.” Neville’s blush rivaled Greg’s, and Ron and Hermione grinned at their friend, who looked rather shell-shocked. “To Misters Malfoy and Mister Weasley,” Dumbledore continued, “I would like to award five points each for a particularly dexterous flight. I suggest that both teams may want to look into further training these young men for their teams next year,” he said, winking at both Marcus Flint, and Oliver Wood, who was the captain of the Gryffindor team. All three boys beamed at this.

“To Mister Draco Malfoy and Mister Ron Weasley, I would like to award twenty-five points each for the best-played game of chess in the history of Hogwarts.” Both boys’ eyes grew huge at this, and they stared at each other in shock. Orion couldn’t help but grin at their response. They deserved it, and he hoped that their little chess match would help them become better friends in the future.

“To Mister Weasley, I would also like to award another twenty-five points for the willingness to lose so others could win.” Now even Orion was wide-eyed. Ron had won fifty points just for the chess match! He grinned at his friend, and gave him a thumbs-up.

“To Miss Granger, for the use of cool logic when under pressure, I would like to award Gryffindor house twenty-five points.” Hermione grinned and flushed, hiding her face from the rest of the school in pleased embarrassment.

“And finally, to Mister Orion Malfoy, for pure nerve and outstanding courage in the face of exceptional danger, I would like to award fifty points. He could give us all lessons in courage, I believe.” There was a rushing sound in Orion’s ears at this, and he entirely missed the cheers from the Slytherins as he was buried under not only Draco, Vince and Greg’s enthusiastic hugs, but even those from his Gryffindor friends, who had rushed across the room to congratulate him.

Dumbledore waited for the hubbub to die down before speaking once more. “To thank these courageous students, the house-elves have made a very special feast tonight. I hope you will all enjoy it.” He clapped his hands, and the tables filled with a huge mound of food, including most of the heroes-of-the-hours’ favourite dishes. The Gryffindors returned to their table, though this time it was to a much more pleasant reception, as the older years in general, and the Weasleys in particular, greeted them with open arms.

The two weeks before their exams passed quickly. Defense Against the Dark Arts classes had been cancelled, though Dumbledore assured all the students that there would indeed be exams in that class as well, so they should make sure to study for the class so as to be prepared for them.

Rumours floated through the student population about what might have happened to Quirrell, ranging from theories that he had jumped from the astronomy tower because his true love had scorned him to the suggestion that he had tried to depose Dumbledore, and been killed by the headmaster for his audacity. The latter was particularly popular among the older Slytherins, and Orion and Draco had a difficult time trying to keep silent about what they knew.

The little group spent all their free time in their room studying for the exams, again each person contributing their best subject, and so when the time came for each exam, they all felt quite confident about their chances. And then exams were over, and all that was left was to find out what their marks were, and the leaving feast.

Though Dumbledore had split all the points he had given their little group fairly evenly, Slytherin had won by an overwhelming margin, and Orion, Draco, Vince and Greg were ecstatic, though they tried not to rub their pleasure in their Gryffindor friends’ faces. The night of the leaving feast, the whole hall was decorated in Slytherin green and silver, with their house banner decorating the walls and floating overhead.

The feast was lovely, and the entire group gorged themselves as full as possible before returning to their rooms and crashing for the night.

It had been quite a long year, and now all they wanted to do was collapse and relax for the next two months.

The train ride home was fun. Draco and Ron played a last game of chess, barely ending with Ron winning, and the two boys shaking across the board. “I’ll miss you this summer, Weasley. Orion can’t play worth beans,” Draco grinned.

“Well,” Ron grinned. “I guess I’ll have to practice this summer so as not to get rusty, eh?”

Orion’s eyes lit up at this. “Better, we could have you visit the Manor during the summer, Ron. Wouldn’t that be cool? We could play Quidditch, and the two of you could play chess all you wanted.”

Draco looked dubious at this. “I don’t know that father will be willing to allow him over after our little adventure, Ori.”

“It can’t hurt to ask, Draco,” Orion shrugged. “So, you up for it, if Lucius will allow it, Ron?”

Ron looked back and forth between the brothers before grinning. “Yeah, I’d be up for that.”

In a dark cell, a man stared at the picture in front of him. A picture that had appeared in the newspaper a month before. The three boys in it grinned out at him unawares, but it was the rat in the picture that truly caught his attention. Peter. He was still alive. And still in rat form. And the man knew he had to pay. That he was the only one who knew. He would have to escape. Had, in fact, been planning his escape since the moment he had first seen the picture.

Hearing the scrape of the door in the next cell, the man stuffed the picture in his pocket, and transformed into a huge black dog. When the door to his own cell was opened, he pushed quickly past the dementors, and made his way towards the light of day. He was glad he was in dog-form, because he knew had he been in human form, the light hitting his eyes would have slowed him considerably, after eleven years in that dark place. He scrambled up onto the rocks, and dove into the ocean below. It was cold, but it kept him awake as he

swam as fast as he could. He could no longer recall how far the prison was from shore, but he hoped it wasn't too far, his legs were already growing tired.

When the dog finally reached shore, it dragged itself out onto the beach and lay there a moment. He wasn't able to rest for long, though. He was sure the alarms had already gone off at the prison, and it wouldn't do to have him caught on the beach before even trying to move again. He stumbled to his feet and hurried to the nearby brush, where he collapsed, hidden by a bush.

He wasn't too sure where this Weasley family lived, though he knew the family by name, but he knew they lived somewhere along the River Otter, so surely he could just follow it, and he would eventually find them. After all, how hard could it be to find a family of a bunch of red heads?

Pimpilidimpi – Thank you so much for the compliment. I really didn't think that Orion would react at all the same way Harry did. After all, not only is he a Slytherin, but he's Lucius Malfoy's son, or at least raised as one. He's definitely learned to be cautious when it comes to odd situations, and this would definitely qualify, wouldn't you say:D Hope you enjoy the ending.

A el la heh – Thank you. I'm glad you like it so much. I have no problem having my story in others' C2 Communities, and there is no need to ask my permission, but thank you for doing so.

C.M Aeris Queen of Insanity – Well, if you read my AN above, there will be a sequel, but it'll be a while in coming, as I have a bunch of other stories to finish before July 16. :D Glad I made you change your opinion of Vince and Greg. Mine has changed as well, working with them over the last year and a half. :)

Beth5572 – Thank you for all your reviews, I hope you liked the ending.

Crystal Cat-chan – When I saw your review in my mailbox, I couldn't help but squee. I love long reviews, and yours are always lovely to read. I'm glad you feel I did a good job separating this story from

canon. I've tried my best to make differences that made sense, while still sticking to the same general plotline. Ah, as to Dumbledore, could you tell an eleven-year old boy (yes, he's eleven, even though he had a birthday with Draco, that wasn't his real birthday, and they both know it.) that a madman was hunting down his family because of him? I don't know if this Dumbledore will be much better at deciding to tell Ori the truth, though, as it's hard to make the determination about when a child is ready to hear a truth like that, to be honest. Hadn't really thought about Fudge's reactions to all this. I wonder what they will be when he does find out… :D Quirrell…I purposely, even in this chapter, left it as open as JK did, as I'm not sure what her intentions were, and so I don't want to close off too much by "killing" him for sure. Orion is still Harry, and as time goes on, he'll become more so, including Harry's "saving people thing." :) Thank you for all your lovely comments. Any votes as to which Hufflepuffs or Ravenclaws should join their group?

To everyone who's ever reviewed, and to all those who have been reading all along, thank you all so much.

Finding Harry 2

Mischief Managed

INFAMOUS KILLER ESCAPES!
Sirius Black at large

The Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, announced today that prisoner Sirius Black, infamous mass murderer has disappeared from Azkaban Prison without a trace. As readers should be aware, it is impossible to apparate to or from the island prison. The Aurors are at a loss to explain how he might otherwise have escaped, but assure the public that they are already on his trail, and that he will be apprehended.

Black, who has been incarcerated in Azkaban for nearly eleven years, is guilty of the mass murder of a dozen Muggles and a wizard. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement advises the public not to approach Black if they catch sight of him, but to notify the Ministry of his presence at once.

A/N: Just a note to everyone interested…I have posted the first chapter of FH2 here on though it is under a new story header. I hope you'll all go check it out. :D

Finding Harry 2

Mischief Managed

Prologue

In a dark cell, a man stared at the picture in front of him. A picture that had appeared in the newspaper a month before. The three boys in it grinned out at him unawares, but it was the rat in the picture that truly caught his attention.

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Cornelius Fudge was having a bad week. His secretary had just informed him that she would be needing to leave her position within the next month – she was getting married, and her fiancée was insisting that she no longer work after the wedding. His mother-in-law had appeared on their doorstep only the night before, and would apparently be staying indefinitely. His nephew had decided to join a Muggle “stone” band, or somesuch. The cafeteria was out of coffee as well as his favorite Danish. And now this…

No, this was not good at all. There was no way the man should have been able to escape. It was entirely inconceivable. Perhaps he had had help? But who would want to help a murderer? No, there must be something they were missing here.

And then Cornelius’s day got worse.

Albus Dumbledore came to see him.

It wasn’t that he didn’t like the man. It was just that he was—intimidating. The man was always so unruffled, and he always had an answer for everything. Cornelius was certain that he was about to hear something he wouldn’t like at all.

“Dumbledore,” he said in the most jovial tone he could manage. Joviality was so much more difficult to muster these days.

“Cornelius. How lovely to see you,” the Headmaster said in his usual buoyant tones.

Cornelius managed a smile. “Please, Dumbledore, do sit down. How can I help you? He had some idea of why he was here, but he waited to hear exactly what it was the Hogwarts Headmaster wanted this time.

“It’s about the Dementors, Cornelius. I want you to withdraw them from where you have them stationed around the school. I refuse to allow them anywhere near my students.”

“Now, Dumbledore…” he began in a cajoling tone.

“Cornelius, those creatures are bad enough for adults. It would be abhorrent to give them a chance to harm children.”

“Dumbledore, we have placed Dementors in key positions throughout Britain. We need them everywhere if we are to find Black before he commits another massacre.”

I assure you, Cornelius, I and my staff are more than able to protect our students, and I do not trust those creatures in the least. You would do well to follow my example in this. They simply are not trustworthy.”

Cornelius shifted uncomfortably. “Now, Dumbledore…”

“I simply cannot allow it, Cornelius. I assure you, I can keep the children safe without their help.”

“At least allow me to station them nearby, Dumbledore,” Cornelius said in a cajoling tone.

“Cornelius…” the Headmaster sounded as though he were about to go into another calm admonishment, but the Minister knew he couldn’t allow it.

“Headmaster, I must be seen to be doing something for the children. Surely you must understand that.”

The Headmaster looked at him for a long moment. Finally, just when Cornelius was sure that Dumbledore was about to refuse once again, the Headmaster sighed. “Well, as much as I would prefer you station Aurors rather than Dementors, I do understand that that would stretch Ministry resources far too thin... As long as they do not come onto the grounds, Cornelius. At the first problem, I expect you to remove them. Are we understood?”

Cornelius flushed at being admonished as though he were still one of Dumbledore’s students. “I assure you, Dumbledore, the Dementors will cause you no problems.”

“Hm,” the Headmaster responded. He rose to his feet. “Well, I suppose I should go deal with finding the school a new Defense teacher,” he said with a smile.

Cornelius rose as well. “It was lovely talking to you, Dumbledore.”

Dumbledore nodded, and Cornelius watched as he left, lost in thought. There went the rest of his day. Dementors were so difficult to explain things to…

Definitely a bad week.

To Remus Lupin, Hollyhock Cottage, Troedyrhiw, Wales

Remus,

I am writing to request that you return to Hogwarts to take up the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts professor.

As I am sure you are aware, Sirius Black’s escape has the Ministry on high alert, and the Minister has decided to set Dementors in key places hoping to find him. The school will be one of these places, and I would be pleased if you would come here, as I feel that you would be one of Sirius’s ultimate targets, seeing that you are his final living school associate.

Your illness should not pose a problem. You may have heard about a recent discovery which will help with your monthly illness. I have discussed the potion with our Potions Master, and he assures me that he feels the potion would pose him no difficulty.

I do hope to hear an affirmative response from you.

Albus Dumbledore

Headmaster, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Order of Merlin, First Class

Grand Sorcerer, Chief Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confederation of Wizards

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Snape was in a fury. He'd managed to bite his tongue through the entire staff meeting. From the moment the Headmaster had mentioned the werewolf would be taking the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts, the rage had been fighting to escape. The Headmaster seemed quite oblivious, though, and was completely ignoring Snape's repeated attempts to catch his attention.

Finally, Flitwick moved away from Dumbledore, and Snape approached the Headmaster, glaring down Sprout when she tried to do the same. She backed off with a startled look, and Snape turned to see Dumbledore looking at him, eyebrow raised, eyes twinkling in a way Snape especially hated.

"Headmaster," Snape growled through clenched teeth.

"Yes, Severus? Was there something you needed?"

"You cannot hire that…that beast," he snarled.

"I can and I have, Severus," Dumbledore said sternly, though his eyes were still twinkling. "I believe you assured me that you could make the Wolfsbane potion with little difficulty?"

“You asked me if I felt I had the skill to brew the potion, not if I were willing to brew it every single month for a year, let alone for *him*. I refuse.”

“Then we have a problem, Severus, as I have already hired him. I leave it up to you whether or not you make the potion. I suppose I could always contact Horace to make it.”

Snape sneered at that. Slughorn brewing the Wolfsbane? With his skill, they’d all be mauled to death in their beds during the first full moon. “*I* could tell Lucius exactly who you have hired to teach his sons,” Snape shot back. “Is it not enough to have one mad murderer on the loose? Do we really need one in the school itself?”

“Severus, you know that Remus has never harmed anyone, intentionally or not.” His face grew stern. “As for Lucius Malfoy, should he learn of Remus’s condition, be assured that I will learn exactly how he did so. And should I learn that you were somehow involved…” The Headmaster let the statement dangle, and Snape glowered, understanding the implied threat, then turned and stormed from the room. Once again, one of his precious Marauders far outranked a lowly Slytherin, Head of House or no.

BLACK ATTACKS!

Ottery St. Catchpole Family Living in Fear

Ottery St Catchpole. Aurors were called to the home of Mr and Mrs Arthur Weasley late last night, where Sirius Black had apparently tried to attack one of the youngest members of the family. Arthur Weasley, 45, a Ministry employee, and his family were just settling down to sleep when the attack took place.

Sirius Black had apparently been hiding in the attic. “We had noticed that the ghoul in the attic seemed quiet,” Mr Weasley stated, “but we didn’t think about it until Ron screamed.” The attack started with the youngest Weasley boy, Ron, aged 12, whose bedroom is at the top of the Weasley home.

Aurors believe that Black had been planning on killing the entire family, working his way down, floor by floor, but the boy's cries upon seeing him woke the entire household, and Black, fearful of capture, fled.

The Ministry has assured this reporter that the Aurors are on the case, but the question remains: why did Black go after this family? And who will he attack next? The Wizarding World waits in terrified silence to find out the answer.

Lucius Malfoy was torn between concern, fury and, for lack of a better term, amusement. After his confrontation with Arthur Weasley a few weeks before at Hogwarts, he'd been working on something to make the man pay.

And then his wife's dear cousin had seen fit to throw a wrench into his plans. Of course, Lucius knew that the wretch wasn't one of his Master's cohorts. The man had always been such a Muggle-lover. There was also the fact that Lucius knew the truth about the wizard who had betrayed the Potters. It hadn't been Black. He had assumed at the time that the ratty little man had found a way to frame Black, then escaped, though he had wondered how the man, who seemed rather talentless, had managed it. Surely the Ministry would have noticed an apparation out of the area at the time he had presumably been killed. Particularly since the attack had been in a Muggle area.

Yes, there were definitely things he wanted to learn about Peter Pettigrew. Before he killed him, of course.

When Black had seen fit to terrify the Weasleys, Lucius couldn't help his amusement, though. Apparently Black was either entirely out of his mind, or he hated the Weasleys as much as Lucius did.

Lucius would have thought that Black's first target would have been Bartemeus Crouch. The man had been responsible for Black's incarceration, after all. It had been so easy to convince him to lock Black up and throw away the key. It had been extremely amusing to Lucius that Crouch had been so easily convinced by the assurance that as much as he cared for his cousin, he definitely felt that there

was no saving the boy. He had been quite thrilled when Crouch had categorically denied Black a trial.

It had been one less worry he'd had to deal with when it had come to his new son. The Potters had no remaining family, and with two of their closest friends out of the way, the third seemed to fade into the shadows. It had made things far too easy.

Black's escape, though… Certainly Orion looked very little like the Potters, but should Black somehow get a good look at the boy, who knew what might happen?

No, this might cause him problems, but his plans had to proceed apace. Whatever else, he needed to keep Dumbledore and Black away from each other, and he had already laid out the groundwork for a new plan. Orion, fond of that Weasley, had been trying to convince him to allow that boy and his sister to stay at the Manor for the rest of the summer. Lucius had categorically refused, and was currently waiting for his wife's retaliation.

Narcissa had always been contrary, but ever since learning the truth about Orion, she had become especially pig-headed. He was sure that it would only be a matter of time before—

The door to his study opened abruptly, and Lucius looked up to see his wife standing in the doorway looking stern. "Lucius, I think we need to talk."

Lucius suppressed a smile of triumph. "Of course, my dear."